PRACTICAL CRITICISM

AND

SOME ASPECTS OF ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

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PREFACE

These two brief essays are aimed at giving the reader some introduction to applied criticism and to the main issues involved in the *Poetics* of the first important critic of literature, Aristotle. The second essay might give Muslim readers food for thought because of the proscription in Islam of the graphic and imitative arts. It would be interesting to see how, over the centuries, Muslim artists have created art forms without the imitative principle, and how far they have managed to circumvent the interdiction.

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PRACTICAL CRITICISM

Before we set out to criticise poetry, we might attempt to come to some kind of understanding of the nature of poetry.

Is poetry what it is because of its form, i.e., because of its rhythm, rhyme, diction, imagery, inversions, etc. ?

Clearly, no. Suppose we were to take Newton's third law of motion and convert it into a rhyming couplet, the result would not be poetry. Nor could it be claimed that 'down he went' is more poetic than 'he went down'; hence inversions are not necessary to poetry. If they were, a lot of Wordworth's poetry would have to be discarded.

Also, there is a lot of poetical writing which does not adhere to the requirements of rhyme, rhythm, etc. Examples might be found in the parables of the Bible and the works of Carlyle.

Is poetry the product of its matter ?

A lot of people seem to think so, but their stand is untenable. Take a good poem and paraphrase it. The paraphrase (which is the matter of the poem) cannot be itself called a poem.

The way out of the argument is to assume that poetry is, at least in part, an alloy or amalgam of both form and matter. The constituents of bronze are brass and tin, yet bronze exhibits characteristics different from those of either brass or tin.

Herein lies the primary difficulty of practical criticism. To analyse poetry is to reduce it to its constituents, none of which are themselves poetic : at the same time it is imposible to appreciate poetry without bringing our analytical faculties to bear upon it. To breathe is to judge, to judge is to analyse, and to analyse (unfortunately) is to break a poetic whole into its unpoetic parts.

The tendency among Pakistani students is to dig deep for some philosophy, moral or message, and to ignore the rather obvious fact that poetry also has a form. It is suggested here that both aspects should be considered when the student approaches a piece of poetry. There is one school of thought which seriously suggests that the study of style, method, form, etc., is the only true field of the critic, because the themes of poetry are few in number. However, it will serve us best if we try to *understand* poetry, and the effort to understand implies some attention to the *what* (matter, message, moral or philosophy) and some attention to the *how* (form, diction, devices, method).

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LET US ASSUME THAT IT IS AN ATTEMPT BY A POET TO COMMUNICATE AN EXPERIENCE

We have the right to demand that the experience be worthwhile, not trivial or insignificant. However, there are some apparently trivial poems which release considerable meaning only after several close readings, hence we must be on our guard not to condemn too hastily. In fact, we would do well to first decide what cannot be validly done in criticism :

A List of Don'ts :

(1) Do not judge one piece of art in terms of another :— Comparisons, unless there is some common basis, are dangerous things. And we may be quite sure that there can be no common basis between, say,the poetry of Donne and that of Chaucer. There is another danger : if we like one of Shakespeare's sonnets better than one of Wordsworth's, we might jump to the false, or at least suspect, general conclusion that Shakespeare is a better poet than Wordsworth. This conclusion could be challenged by the following arguments :

(*a*) We might like Shakespeare's sonnet more than Wordsworth's : but our taste might not be universal, nor demonstrably the best.

(*b*) What we like today might be changed or reserved tomorrow. Would we then reverse our previous judgement ?

(*c*) From a single example, or even from several examples, would it be fair to draw a general conclusion ?

Our only possible assertion is, 'today, this particular sonnet by Shakespeare appeals to me more than this particular sonnet by Wordsworth : but I do not know if my taste is shared by everyone else, or even by anyone else ; nor can I be sure that my own taste will be the same for the rest of my life as it is now, hence I am not justified in making any general claim about the relative excellences of Shakespeare and Wordsworth.'

(2). **Do not condemn poetry for what you cannot see in it:**— The argument is simple. If you enter a dimly-lit room and are just able to make out the presence of a table and three chairs, you are not justified in asserting that there is, therefore, no other furniture in the room. Another person with sharper eyesight might be able to detect other objects which are invisible to you.

The tone of your criticism should be appreciative of the things you can discern, not condemnatory because of things you have not been able to discern. This is *Important*.

(3) **Do not treat poetry as a philosophic manifesto:**—Prose is probably a better medium for the communication of thoughts. One must keep it in mind that poetry is trying to do something else than just communicate thoughts. Both prose and poetry use words, both prose and poetry use symbols, metaphors and images. Both have some kind of rhythm and music, although the music of poetry is more obvious than that of prose. Nevertheless there is a considerable difference. In reading a prose tract we are entitled to judge it by its thought-content. In reading poetry we must look for *total effect*.

(4) **Do not assume that what the poet has said is necessarily an indication of the poet's mind or personality.** Poetry is only one aspect of a man's activities, and may have very little bearing on his other activities. It is quite possible for a professional soldier, engaged in the killing of other men, to write idealistically about universal fellowship. However, it is also possible that a man's interests in say, banking, politics or business might have repercussions on the kind of poetry that he writes. The question should be left open. Hasty conclusions should not be drawn. Either side is dubious ; to study the man and than judge his poetry is as uncertain as to study his poetry and then judge the man. We would do best to study and judge his poetry.*

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*Of course, anything which can help towards the fuller understanding of a poem is welcome. If a knowledge of Shelley's politics can help us to appreciate *Adonais* better, by all means let us learn about them. Also, until we have studied the biographical facts of an author's life, we cannot determine what aspect of his life is relevant to his poetry or not. The student will normally be expected to analyse an unseen passage, hence, the poem will be more important than the poet, even if the student can guess the authorship.

(5) **This is the hardest stricture, but do not evaluate:**—Avoid the use of relative and emotive terms like 'best', 'greatest', magnificent'. The mere use of superlatives is no indication of an ability to appreciate. True appreciation lies in the ability to understand and explain.

Once we have became aware of the main negatives, we can come round to the positives. First on the list is, naturally :

(1) **Read the poem carefully :**—This seems obvious, but we must here point out that reading something carefully means reading it with interest, staying alert to the possible implications and associated meanings of the words in front of you, looking for dominant metaphors or special sound effects, and at the same time keeping in mind the piece as a whole. This is not easy ; the average Pakistani student has no instinctive love for English poetry.

(2) **Give it a chance to act as a poem :**—Which means that it should be read *whole* as a piece of verbal music, not piece-meal as though it were bad prose cut up into lines which happen to rhyme every now and then.

Within these two positives will be found both the *what* and the *how* of poetry. The two should be seen as something closely woven into each other. The poet has crystalised his meaning into words which he has arranged into a rhythmical pattern, but both the words and the rhythms are really a part of the total effect. To state this more simply, effect cannot be communicated without words, so words are also part of the effect.

WORDS & METRE

The tools of poetry are its words. Any word can be seen to have at least three functions :

(*a*) It conveys a meaning ;

(*b*) It evokes a picture ;

(*c*) It makes a sound.

Hence any word has at least three potential areas for exploration and exploitation. Poetry attempts to use words in

a way which exploits all three areas to their fullest, *i.e.*, the area of sense, the area of visual imagery and the area of sound or music.

Most words also have a double area of meaning. There is its dictionary meaning, usually called its *denotative* meaning, and its associative meaning, usually called its *connotative* meaning. In poetry, both are important. The word 'sky' in its denotative meaning refers only to the layer of air over the earth which happens to look blue on a clear day. Its connotations are many ; it traditionally has something to do with 'heaven', the seat of God, the source of our well-being and woe, the source of sunlight and rain, or of Providence or Fate (like 'a bolt from the blue') ; it is somehow associated with light, air and freedom, also with goodness and purity, also with fear.

The word 'rainbow' denotes the phenomenon produced when sunlight is refracted through droplets of water in the atmosphere. It connotes many things; it is beautiful but unsubstantial; it seems to be optimistic and hopeful ; it is a religious symbol of God's mercy after the Flood ; it has a 'pot of gold' at its endings, so there is some vague sense of promise about it ; it is short-lived, many-coloured and transparent, so there is also a vague sense of regret at the knowledge that it must pass away.

As most words can be interpreted in many ways, so also most concepts can be expressed through different words. Take, the 'house', 'home', 'residence', 'abode' series. The basic concept is of a building or structure made of bricks and mortar, in which a person lives. Yet 'house' does not mean quite the same as any of the others ; 'home' has the emotional connotations of peace and security, 'residence' smacks of pompous ostentation, 'abode' gives rise to connotations of permanence.

It is also possible to express the same basic concept by diametrically opposed words. Thus 'love' and 'hate' are said to be really the same, just as 'pity' and 'fear'. A man who takes risks can be called either 'courageous' or 'foolhardy'. A man who spends a lot of money can be called either 'generous' or

'extravagant'. It depends on the emotional reaction of the person describing him. If he likes what the man is doing he will use the term of praise for him: if he does not he will use the term of censure.

Thus it will be seen that similar words can be used for a basic concept, and that each of those words has its own connotations, and that opposite words can also be used for a basic concept, indicating the emotional response of the person using them.

The foregoing deals with words in isolation. However, as anyone can see, language does not use isolated words. Just as no single note of music can be called musical, so no single word can be called poetical. Take the word 'hail'; by itself it is merely a noise, or a series of letters typed on paper. But in relation with other words it can reveal its poetic potential with good effect :

'Hail, to thee, blithe spirit'
'Hail holy light, offspring of heaven first born'.

Take the word 'or'; by itself it is nothing, yet Milton can convert it into music by placing it with other words :

'Of Oreb, or of Sinai, did'st inspire'

the first part of which would be read something like *'Ovoreborov sinai'*.

The word should therefore be seen in relation, first to the words which come immediately before and after it, then to the line in which it is situated, then to the stanza or verse of which it is a part, and finally to the poem as a whole.

This wholeness of vision is not easy to attain.[1] But it is necessary if one is to make a well rounded critique of a poem.

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1. Some people might argue that, in fact, it is impossible, because arts like music and writing are mobile things. Each part of a poem is brought separately before the consciousness of the reader, hence it is the parts rather than the whole which are the true objects of our attention. However, few will deny that some vague memory of the beginning and subsequent development of the poem remains in the mind no matter to what part of the poem the reader is attending. Matthew Arnold's injunction to view the poem 'steadily and whole' is really an appeal to the critic to become aware of the essential relationship of all the parts to the whole. Aristotle also emphasises this 'parts in relation to the whole' attitude.

There are very few languages which follow no kind of stress pattern, and English is no exception. When words are used in a continual flow, a certain rise and fall of the voice, a certain stressing or otherwise automatically occurs. This gives rise to what is called verbal music, and this music can be found in prose as well as poetry. The difference is that the verbal music of prose tends to follow no pre-determined framework of form, while that of poetry is worked out so that there is a pleasing regularity called metre. Plato felt that beauty was best expressed in numbers, symmetry and order, and this may well be deemed true when we remember the pleasure derived from the hearing of music or the reading of a well thought-out poetic verse.

Conversely, there have been some theorists who have felt that the verbal music of poetry is unnatural, so there have been attempts more recently to bring the language of poetry as close as possible to that of prose. No attempt will be made here to pronounce finally on either theory. Regularity may be pleasing and desirable in music, but in poetry, which also conveys thoughts, it might be difficult to adjust a thought to a pre-ordained pattern of sound without doing some violence to either the thought or the metre. Hence, one would do well to remain neutral towards 'modern' styles of writing in which no rhythms or forms seem to be evident. In fact, the attitude of neutrality should be cultivated anyhow ; one should wait and see what the poem does for one rather than try to apply one's prejudices (which we all possess) to it.

The smallest unit of sound in a word is the syllable. There is a general rule for the pronunciation of polysyllabic words in English. This is that the stress falls on the third last syllable, so that we get, 'photOgraphy', (not 'photogrAphy', as is common in Pakistan) or 'ingenUity' (and not 'ingEnuity'). As with all rules, there are exceptions,[1] but this may be used as a guide when in doubt.

1. Like 'CONtroversy' (about which there is a controversy) or 'ALLegory'. Also some words like 'musEum'.

Another rule is that link words, conjunctions and the like, are usually unstressed. For example ;

Man of *War* ;

in which both 'man' and 'war' would receive some stress, while 'of' remains unstressed.

This rule also applies to the articles, 'a', 'an' and 'the' ;

This is the *day*.
I have an *apple*.
He is a *man*.

Polysyllabic means 'several syllables'. What about words with only two or three syllables? the general rule here is that the *first* syllable is stressed, like 'RATion' or 'RIDicule'.[2] This tendency to stress the early part of the noun has led English to become an 'analytic' language, somewhat like Chinese, though to a lesser degree.

A correct reading of word stresses will give the basic metre of any line of poetry :

ʋ — ʋ —ʋ — ʋ ʋ ʋ —
Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit

each small mark represents one syllable, the stressed being marked thus—, and the unstressed thus ʋ. It will be seen that there are ten syllables in this line, making what is called a decasyllabic line (deca = 10). It will also be noticed that the dominant pattern is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one. We now divide the line into pairs of syllables, giving five divisions :

ʋ — ʋ —ʋ — ʋ ʋ ʋ —
(1) Of Man's/first dis/obed/ience, and/the fruit

each pair is called a poetic 'foot', and five such pairs make up the most common line in English poetry called the pentametre. (Penta=5).

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2. We are here talking about nouns, of course. The difference between 'REgect' (The noun) and 'reGECT' (the verb) is an example of a common procedure in the language.

The basic pattern in the foregoing line is unstressed followed by stressed ᴗ —. This makes up the most common foot in English poetry, called the *Iambic foot*. The line is, therefore, in the iambic pentametre. Notice that the fourth foot is not iambic, not unless you are willing to stress the word 'and'. This makes no difference to the general metre. The next line in this poem reads off perfectly in the iambic pentametre :

ᴗ — ᴗ — ᴗ — ᴗ — ᴗ —
(2) Of that/forbid/den tree,/whose mort/al taste......

There are other metres and other kinds of poetic feet. There is the octosyllabic line, with eight syllables. Usually the metre is determined by dividing the number of syllables by 2. The octosyllabic line usually becomes a quatrametre, which gives four main divisions each containing one poetic foot :

ᴗ — — — ᴗ — ᴗ —
(3) And now/ I feel/that this/is so ;

the second foot not being in the iambic pattern ; even so, this line may be described as an iambic quatrametre, because with just the slightest concession it would be possible to leave the word 'I' unstressed.

The hexasyllabic line normally becomes a tri-metre (6/2=3), the tetrasyllabic (or quatrasyllabic) becomes a di-metre, the disyllabic becomes the monometre. I have used the words 'usually' and 'normally' because the most common kind of foot contains two syllables, as follows : (we have seen the iambic foot, or iambus) :

(*a*) The trochaic foot, or trochee, has a stressed sound followed by an unstressed sound, — ᴗ . It is the reverse of the iambus.

(*b*) The spondaic foot, or spondee, has two syllables both stressed, — — .

(*c*) The pyrrhic foot, or pyrrhic, has two syllables both unstressed, ᴗ ᴗ.

Now it can be seen that an accurate scansion of example (1) would be that it has five feet in the basic iambic stress, but the fourth foot is a pyrrhic. Likewise, example (3) shows a spondee in the second foot.

There are poetic feet with three or sometimes more syllables. We will mention only those which have three, because the others are not often to be found in English poetry, and if they are, they can usually be divided into other kinds of feet containing two or three syllables which can then be scanned in accordance with the rules given here. We have :

(*d*) The anapaestic foot, or anapaest (now often spelt 'anapest') which has three syllabes, two unstressed followed by one stressed, ∪ ∪ —.

(*e*) The dactylic foot, or dactyl, which is one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, — — ∪.

An example of anapaests :

∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —
(4) The Assyr/ian came down/like a wolf/on the fold,

this line is in the anapaestic quatrametre. And of dactyls, although here we will see that not all of the feet are dactylic, giving what is called a mixed line :

— ∪ ∪ — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ —
(5) How in a/garden,/blown with the/breath of/Morn

the dactyls are to be found in the first and third foot. The last foot is truncated, as often happens when trochees are being used. Notice, also, that this line has eleven syllables, but the general rhythm is maintained because the unstressed syllables in anapaests and dactyls are meant to be spoken lightly, trippingly, so the total *time* value remains within a certain pattern. The loss of a syllable when employing trochees is visible in the following examples :

— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ —
(6) Hammer,/hammer,/ I have/heard, (seven syllables instead of eight, yet this would by called a quatrametre)

— ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪ — ∪
(7) Love took/up the/glass of/time and/turn'd it/in his/
— ∪ —
glowing/hands, (fifteen instead of sixteen, yet this is still an octametre)

The loss of a syllable can be explained by assuming that these

lines are really iambic in concept, but that the iambic feet have been converted into trochees by omitting the first unstressed syllable. Let us add one unstressed syllable to the beginning of example (7) :

υ — υ — υ — υ — υ — υ
So Love/took up/the glass/of Time/and turn'd/it
— υ — υ —
in his glo/wing hand ;

we now have sixteen syllables in the iambic metre or an iambic octametre.

A common feature of all the preceding examples is that the last syllable is stressed. This is called the masculine ending, and is more common than the feminine, in which the last stress falls on either the second or the third last syllable : the rhyme shown below is called feminine for the same reason :

— υ — υ
(8) John was yawning
— υ — υ
In the morning

Important to the achievement of over-all rhythms are the pauses introduced by commas or other punctuation marks. The word used to indicate a pause in prosody is 'caesura'. There is a caesura implied at the end of every line, because it takes the eye some time to travel from the end of one line to the beginning of the other. Close attention should be paid to the punctuation employed by the poet, because this indicates how he would like the piece to be read as a whole :

(9) Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat...

the caesura is shown shifting up and down the lines, producing a variable effect within the fixed framework of the iambic pentametre. Milton's lines could be re-written thus :

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit of that forbidden

tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world, and all our woe with loss of Eden, till one greater man restore us, and regain the blissful seat......

or

Of Man's first disobedience,
And the fruit of that forbidden tree,
Whose mortal taste brought death into the world,
And all our woe with loss of Eden,
Till one greater man restore us,
And regain the blissful seat......

The first five lines of *Paradise Lost* make a musical unit ; there is a rise and fall of voice which seems to suit the statement made in example (9), a building up of sound in the first line to a peak which is maintained in lines two and three, then a gradual falling away and cadence ending in the almost unemotional 'and regain the blissful seat'. Also it is worth noting that apart from the metrical rhythms to be found in every line, there is a larger rhythm running through the unit as a whole :

Of *Man's* first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought *death* into the world, and all our woe
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Re*store* us, and regain the blissful seat......

This sort of total musical pattern can usually be found in poetry worth its salt, and is one of the differences between mechanical verse, which any schoolboy can write, and true poetry. When the musical unit of a verse is just a single line it might indicate some paucity of *whole* comprehension on the part of the poet. However, there are very good poems which achieve a total musicality even when the unit is the line rather than the verse or the verse paragraph :—

(10) Ring out ye crystal spheres,
Once bless our human ears,
(If ye have power to touch our senses so)......

but even here (which is again from Milton, the *Nativity Ode*)

no line can be seen in isolation, each is subtly connected to its fellows by a complex of meaning and sound.

Rhyming, which became unpopular at one time, secures two effects. It produces a pleasing repetition which marks some kind of ending, and it helps in the creation of organic unity. In the Persian *ghazal*, for instance, each couplet makes a separate unit of thought, but is connected to other couplets by virtue of a common rhyming scheme embodied both in the internal rhymes and in the end rhymes, (the 'kafia' and 'radeef'). Lines which rhyme tend to be connected by us when we read them. When we come across a poem employing the rhyming scheme aa b c a, we may expect that the first two lines will state something, the two lines which follow will be some kind of digression from, or expansion of, the first, and the last line will either restate the problem, or sum it up, or supply a solution. It is rare that this would be done consciously by the poet, but it will often be seen working as a factor in the process of making poetry. The Persian quatrain or *rubai* permits some exposition and movement away in its third line; a return to the problem and its answer comes in the last line which rhymes with the opening two :

(11) Into this world, and why, not knowing,
Nor whence like water, willy-nilly flowing ;
And out of it like wind upon the waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing.

A rhyming word can be used in positions other than the end of a line. It produces a chiming effect when it is repeated in one line, *e.g.*,

The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain,

or

'Tirra Lirra', by the River,
Sang Sir Lancelot,

and an echo effect when it is spotted about the poem or verse as a whole ;

Now *back* rode Dick through swamp and hail
And Bess's hoofs went clickety-*clack* !
The *crack* of the musket was mixed with the wail
Of wind through his *jacket*......

Against the undoubted poetic richness which rhyming can achieve, we would do well to note its disadvantages. *First*, it fixes a rhyming scheme which may not be adequate for all the developments of thought to be found in the poem. The Spenserian stanza may be eminently suited for the leisurely description of scenes or the gradual development of an action, but it may not do so well for the excited narration of a battle. All the exigencies of a poem, especially of a long one, may not fit properly into a predetermined pattern. *Second* it limits the vocabulary of the poet because he is forced to hunt for a rhyming word and this word may not be the most suitable at this place, but it has to make do. Unlike Arabic and Persian, English is not rich in rhyming words, so some flexibility of expression is bound to be lost. *Third*, the jingling effect is repugnant rather than pleasing, to some ears. *Fourth*, rhyming prevents, or at least weakens, the true running on of thought from one line to another, because there is the suggestion of finality in rhymed endings. For this reason Shakespeare sometimes introduces a rhyming couplet, to indicate to the audience the ending of a scene or act in a play.

Blank verse, developed by Surrey and Wyatt and used with consummate mastery by Marlowe, Shakespeare and Milton, provides a medium of considerable flexibility, capable of being adjusted to suit most needs which might arise in the course of a poem. The pleasant iterations of sound to be gained by internal rhymes and echoes can be employed without the binding of end rhymes. and on the whole it will be found that this has been the chosen medium of a lot of significant poetry.

A *Dissonance* is when there is a considerable opening and closing of vowel sounds : the effect in a single line is often musical :

To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.

An *Assonance* is when there is little qualitative difference between successive vowel sounds :

They never air their assets when they can.

An assonance sometimes causes difficulty in enunciation, but is a useful poetic device because it provides a contrast to the poetic dissonance.[1] In music there are often deliberately introduced passages which are flat or tangled, so that the relief and pleasure which results from a return to smooth melody is heightened by contrast.

Since poetry is a kind of music (as is all human language), some musical terms can be employed in our critical vocabulary. A *crescendo* indicates a rise in volume of sound, a *diminuendo* indicates a fall in volume. The *cadence* or cadenza indicates the natural approach to the ending of a musical statement, and the ending itself is sometimes called the *coda.*

But poetry is not only verbal music : it is also a kind of painting. Its music is of a special nature because it simultaneously provides thoughts and pictures—its painting is of a special kind because it simultaneously provides emotion and music. The whole complex of thought, music, picturisation and emotion goes towards the presentation of what is called a poetic image.

A *concrete* image is one in which familiar terms are used in such a way that one sense impression is re-inforced by another. We are made, not merely to see a rose, but to smell it, almost, and touch it, and become conscious of the emotional connotations of that rose. The selection of language is such that our senses help each other in the evocation of an image. Keats and Tennyson are often cited for their ability at concrete imagery :

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs......;

the second line of which is specially effective. Tree blossoms

1. The dictionary meaning of dissonance is 'harsh' 'discordant'. However, in poetry it is the dissonance which is often easier and more melifluous than the assonance.

have been reduced to their scent by calling them 'incense', and they are 'soft' (touch) and in full bloom (they 'hang' pendulously on the boughs rather than merely 'grow' on them). The image is strong and positive. So also Tennyson :

> There is sweet music here that softer falls
> Than petals from blown roses in the grass ......;

in which an indeterminable like 'music' is given a definite, though caressingly delicate, tangibility.

Abstract imagery employs a reversal of the above. The known is described in terms of the unknown, the real world is discussed in terms of the ideal. Often, there is a clash between sense-impressions so that the image becomes blurred and indefinable. Shelley provides some good examples, although it should be remembered that he is also capable of an almost three-dimensional solidity when he so desires. His abstract imagery is introduced with a purpose, intended to depict the world as he conceives it, an indistinct, transitory illusion. To depict an illusion in concrete images would be bad poetry indeed.

There are some important verse units which we may attempt to define. The *Heroic Couplet*, which is the medium of a great deal of English poetry, especially in the eighteenth-century, is characterised by two rhyming lines in the iambic pentametre, usually with a caesura between the lines :

> With sunny twine the vocal arbours wreathe,
> And gales enamour'd heavenly fragrance breathe ;

We will not discuss fully the merits of this unit here. It must suffice to say that a well-written heroic couplet allows a certain crispness of expression, ease of enunciation and flexibility of movement despite its rhyming pattern, making it eminently suitable for witty, elegant writing. As a medium for poetic description, which would require leisurely expansion and time to take details into attention, its thrust is probably too rapid and final to be effective. However, Chaucer's famous opening to the Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* employs

this unit with considerable success, so we must talk less about the capabilities of this or that form and more about the ability of the poet to use the medium chosen by him. Dryden and Pope, especially the latter, were able to stretch the possibilities of the heroic couplet to cover a wide range of poetical needs.

The *Quatrain* is a unit of four lines, usually in the iambic pentametre. It may employ alternate rhymes or three rhyming lines with one un-rhyming line, as in the Persian quatrains, or occasionally all lines rhyming, as below :

'Tis all a checkerboard of nights and days
Where destiny with men for pieces plays ;
Hither and thither moves and mates and slays,
Then one by one back in the closet lays.

The *Stanza* is usually a more complex arrangement of lines and rhymes within a certain musical scheme, and would correspond roughly to a paragraph in prose, permitting the development of a number of related thoughts on the periphery of one basic thought. In most of the traditional stanzas it is the music rather than the thought-content which determines their form. Stanzas in modern poetry tend to be variable in form and length, just as in a prose essay one would find paragraphs of varying length. The *Spenserian stanza* is a traditional form which has remained popular because of its flexibility and musicality. The rhyming pattern is ab, ab, bc, bc, c, and the last line contains twelve syllables in the iambic metre ; this is the Alexandrine, or iambic hexametre. The Spenserian stanza is a development of the *Rhyme Royal*, which is seven iambic pentametres in the scheme ab, ab, bc, c. Another well-known stanza form is the *Ottava Rima*, eight iambic pentametres in ab, ab, ab, cc.

The *Verse Paragraph* is less artificial than the stanza and is usally to be found in blank verse. One understands that the poet may require several lines to do justice to a certain train of thought.

Though not truly a verse unit, the *Sonnet* is compact enough to be mentioned here. One can usually discern two movements in its fourteen lines, a division into the first

eight, sometimes called the octave, and the last six, called the sestet. The two parts are related because the second usually answers whatever matter has been posed in the first. There are other varieties of the sonnet, so one would do well not to impose this eight/six division on whatever comes one's way. The names associated with the development of this form are Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth.

A consideration of the sonnet takes us into the field of types of poetry. Till the middle of the eighteenth-century, the most important were *Epic* and *Dramatic* (especially Tragic), both conceived of as modes of 'imitation'. With the rise of other basic concepts such as 'expression' and 'spontaneity' and the positioning of unworded music as the type voice of the inner soul, the *Lyric* came to be considered the most poetic form of poetry. The *Epic* is a long narrative of heroic events, and is big enough to gather into itself pretty nearly everything known at the time it is written. *Tragedy* is given pride of place by Aristotle because of its claimed abilitv to effect a catharsis of pity and fear ; *drama* is characterised by dialogue and the imitation of 'action'. The *Lyric* can be explained by its light musicality and spontaneity ; it is much shorter than the Epic or Drama because it is usually the expression of one emotion or sentiment. The *Ballad* is the closest in poetry to a folk-song and is characterised by easy musicality and uncomplicated sentiment.

A brief definition of some other terms is given here :

Allegory : abstract ideas are given personalities. This is a useful device because it gives solidity to things which are themselves vague. However, its strength is also its weakness because no personification can be complete or accurate, so there is some danger of misrepresentation.

Analogy : an argument by example. This is again useful when the poet wishes to explain his ideas by referring them to something familiar. However, it is dangerous because what is true for the example may not be true for the idea, or it may

only be partially true. 'And it must follow as the night the day, Thou cannot then be false to any man,' might seem plausible, but while we are willing to accept that night follows day, we cannot be sure about the conclusion.

Euphemism : a playing down of an embarrasing idea, a deliberate weakening so that the concept gives no offence.

Euphuism : Elaborate, artificial, ornamental expression.

Hyperbole : Exaggeration, like, 'I bet you a million rupees you can't jump off this table.'

Circumlocution or *Periphrasis* : the unnecessary use of words when the expression of an idea can be achieved satisfactorily in just a few. If this has been employed to achieve incongruous effects, it is a valid device, otherwise it is a fault. *Repetition*, which is another kind of redundancy, is also useful for the emphasis of some ideas and the achievment of some effects.

Cliche : We are entitled to freshness of expression from our poets, not a rehash of known phrases. However, cliche is useful because of its ubiquity. No strain is felt when encountering it, and if it does its job well, there is little point in trying to express a commonplace in new, unfamiliar ways.

Onomatopoeia : Some critics are full of praise for the way poets have on occasions used words which sound something like what they mean ('the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves').

The foregoing is an attempt to understand the methods and techniques of poetry and to fix some of our terms. Clearly, the business of criticism goes beyond a mere analysis of forms, metres, rhyming schemes and syllables, though this cannot be ignored. Method is some indication of purpose, and purpose, though it may fail, gives some clue as to what has motivated the poet.

Technique must be subordinated to the meaning of the poem, the 'sense-quantum' or totality of the thing which will include purpose, effect, rhythm, rhyme, form, emotion, suggestion, assertion, and any other factor which might present itself. The approach should be, 'This is apparently what the poet means ; has his technique helped towards the furtherance and effective presentation of that meaning, or has it distorted and obscured it ?'

And here, unfortunately, we are in trouble. There is no certainty, even when we have understood the intentions of the poet, that the potentials of meaning have been exhausted. The 'fallacy of intention', though this has probably been played up too much by some modern theorists, does point out valid fields of doubt. A poet may intend something and achieve something else—it happens in all writing and communication. An anecdote given by Coghill illustrates this well. He witnessed a performance of T. S. Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* and was very surprised at the interpretation presented by the producer. Having observed Eliot at the same performance he decided to ask him if this was what Eliot had intended himself. He discovered that it was not, and that Eliot did not think that an interpretation of his works should be circumscribed by what he meant while writing it. This is specially true of modern, suggestive, non-explicit writing, but is also true of older, more explicit forms. And from this difficulty arises the variety and inconsistency of criticism. Things mean different things to different people. A 'lion' might mean courage and strength to one person, viciousness and terror to another. If a poem is to be judged in terms of what we *think* is the intention of the poet, the field is narrowed somewhat : if, however, we are to judge it in terms of its effect on others, a relativism of paralysing uncertainty may result. If *Sweeney Agonistes* could mean something different to its author, to one of its readers and to a producer within a small circle, we could expect that this inconsistency of interpretation would grow as the circle grows.

A little reflection will show that neither alternative can be eliminated. The artist's intention does serve to partially define the meaning of his work, but when that work is submitted to

the attention of others, it must perforce be subjected to a whole battery of tastes, personalities, private interests and bents of mind, degrees of enthusiasm or boredom, conditions of comfort and receptivity, social fashions and pressures, mass psychologies and individual unorthodoxies, levels of education, intelligence and awareness—a frightening prospect for those who would believe that the value judgments of criticism can ever be accurate or final. Perhaps there is some point of contact between people where they would agree to a generally 'sound' judgment, but we cannot be sure, nor can we assert that what is generally thought to be right is, therefore, right. Majority is no criterion ; it is possible for one man to be right and a thousand wrong.

We may take heart from this. Our interpretation of a literary work has as much right to consideration as anyone else's. There is no need to hold back timidly because we are dealing with a foreign literature or because we have no first-hand knowledge of conditions in Britain or Europe. *By and large, our interpretation will be what the poem means to us, guided as far as possible by what we think is intended by the poet.* If we can discern some of his intention, we have a foundation to work on which will prevent our evaluation from becoming 'fantastically' original, but thereafter let us trust our own response. They have a point who complain that there are many references in English literature which are strange to Pakistanis, persons whose names are by-words there, idiomatic usages of the language which would give the English no trouble but which would strain our powers of comprehension, a sense of rightness for them which we could never have, and so on. The answer is that we must carry on regardless, conscious that our very handicaps may be advantageous in that as our minds are not conditioned in quite the same way, we may be able to suggest new areas of interesting speculation. In a sense Shakespeare is as much a Japanese playwright as he is an English one, as much a Pakistani as he is an Apache. We will pay as much attention as possible to the conditions under which he wrote, but after that we will discuss him in a light meaningful to us also.[1]

1. Shakespeare can be viewed from the traditional standpoint of Islamic fatalism with considerable plausibility, yet it is unlikely that Shakespeare knew the first thing about Islam.

A word of caution. This is not a justification for the random thrusting of Sufi-istic, Eastern pantheistic[1] or Islamic interpretations on whatever we see, nor is it an invitation to condemn English poetry because it is not like ours or because it does not seem to display this or that quality which can be observed in ours. The first would tend to become fantastic because English literature has not normally been written with an eye on Eastern schools of thought; the second we have already decided early in this essay, is not a valid mode of criticism at all. The thing must not become opinionated and arbitrary.

What we need is guided liberty in this matter. Discipline and restraint on one side, vision and confidence on the other. Our attempt to discover meaning will involve an effort to discover the author's meaning plus what this meaning *means* to us.

All this seems to preclude one popular feature of criticism—appreciative vociferation when we like something after we have worked hard on it. It is suggested that this be left out; lyrical passages about the beauty or splendour or truth of a poem sometimes do not go down well with others, not unless they are supported by hard fact and good reasoning. We are entitled to praise something if we discover that it has been well done, but this praise is not the essence of criticism as some people seem to think.

There is no neat formula for the approach to criticism. I.A.Richards gives one, and it is possible that his categories of Sense, Attitude, Tone and Style cover all that a student would be able to discuss in the limited time at his disposal. Rene Wellek feels that his attempt is a failure (see *Concepts of Criticism* 52), that his reduction of poetry to 'a kind of tonic for our nerves' is an erroneous simplification. Longinus offers something interesting in the division of the poetic achievement into

1. Huxley, dictating from his death-bed, came out with a critique of *The Tempest* from a Vedantic standpoint that the phenomenal world is an illusion or 'Maya'. Here Shakespeare becomes a Hindu, but it is clear that the interpretation has been coloured by Huxley's own Vedantic/mystic predilections.

internal and external factors, the great heart and mind of the poet on one side, and his education, training and language on the other, but here we are shifted to the disposition and developed capabilities of the poet rather than to the meaning and excellences of the poem. It is not a valid procedure to state that this poem is great because the poet is known to possess greatness of mind and heart etc.: greatness of heart could not be a permanent feature, ability at language and structure would be bound to vary from time to time and it is possible that the greatest of poets may blunder frequently, or write sometimes under the compulsions of economics rather than the flair of inspiration. We are to see the poem in hand, not the so-called 'qualities' of the poet.

Swift's 'truth dressed in its Sunday best' would limit our enquiry to the discovery of whatever 'universal truth' there may be and to the appreciation of the style and presentation. Pope's 'what oft was known but ne'er so well express'd' shifts practically everything to a discussion of stylistic excellence—after all, there is little point in repeating what most people already know. Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling . . . . recollected in tranquillity' would pose the jumble of trying to determine that feeling, the extent of its spontaneity, and the accuracy of the recollection during the poet's period of tranquillity, moving us into an area of gossamer-thin psychological speculation and introducing a whole set of intangibles. Aristotle's 'imitation of life' and Arnold's 'criticism of life' have distinct possibilities; the critic may say 'let's see how well the poet has imitated or criticised life in this poem' thus giving him something to work from. But the first might lead him to the fallacy of realism which plagued art for so long, the second would tend to subordinate poetry to some general critical faculty. Of the two, the second would be more productive, because some degree of criticism is anterior to the making of a poem, and a discovery of the thought-processes of the poet would certainly help to our understanding of his poem.

A living poem should have a body, a soul and a mind. The body would be its form, the soul its inspiration, and the mind its message. A 'great' poem, much as we dislike the expression,

would be that which has a great heart or soul, a well-ordered form, and a worthwhile message. The factor which breathes life into the poem is its emotion. Philosophy, which would provide a fair amount of worthwhile thought, would be too unemotional to ever attain the level of poetry, even if it were written in excellent iambic pentametres.

But there is a problem connected with this business of emotion. Is it can it be ever something which belongs to the poem, or is it something which belongs to the poet ? A poem can have a form which rightly belongs to itself, it can even have a message—but can it have an emotion of its own, separated from the emotions of the man who wrote it ? The followers of Hulme, Eliot and Pound seem to think so, and they may be partly right. A poem does seem to generate its own emotion ; it is possible for an actor to create an aura of emotionality without really participating in the emotions—likewise a poet may achieve great intensity of feeling in his poem without taking part in that feeling himself. Whether this is a desirable trait or not is open to discussion. The advocates of impersonal art probably felt that the poem as something more permanent than the poet, should have a life of its own. On the other side, there is a propriety in the expression which grows without artifice from the feelings of a man. Sincerity of sentiment usually scores over artificially induced intensity in its power to move. The man who has felt deeplv and has written chastely often succeeds where the man who has waited for some inspiration to inform him fails ; while the man who pours some kind of strenuous feeling into his poem with no involvement himself may succeed at times, and may not at others—nothing irritates a reader more than to discover that he is the victim of a scheme other than the auditor of an expression of geniune feeling.

It is possible for a poet to say something which he does not mean, or which is in fact the opposite of what he means, or in complete antithesis to his beliefs, and give his utterances the pressure of emotions which he does not feel, or which may be just the reverse of what he feels, and

still succeed in writing effective poetry :[1] but an important element in the reader's reaction is a sense rightness, and this is where sincerity carries the field. A man struck dumb with grief at the death of a close friend may still be more truly eloquent than a professional mourner with all his oratory and drama.

We must stress once more that poetry is not the same as philosophy written in a pleasant manner. If one is going to look for cogency and consistency of thought, one is likely to be disappointed ; often enough the foundational ideas are simple, so simple that one wonders how they have become the subjects of poetry. The themes are few in number, rotating about such central matters as *Love, Creation and Destruction*, *Mutability*, *Cyclicity*, *Life and After-life* (which includes a common wisdom, that of *Carpe Diem* or 'sieze the moment', live life now because you have no knowledge of the future, etc.), *Nature*, *God* and *Religion*, *Man* and *Society*, *Morality* and others. The treatment is expository rather than exploratory ; poetry professes to know, where philosophy feels its way.

Because it is emotive, poetry is susceptible to a number of logical fallacies. Persuasion is almost impossible without emotion, but emotion is itself a kind of question-begging[2] in that it so colours and favours an issue that our judgment of it is bound to be biased. It is the politicians rhetorical trick, and is as much open to fallacious methodology. Poetry functions more on the plausible than on the strictly demonstrable. It indulges, sometimes, in oversimplifications and suspect generalisations, observations which are glibly called 'universals', supposedly

1. We must assume that Shakespeare is not on the side of his villains, nor would he approve of the sentiments which motivate them or the justifications which they offer for their actions. Yet Edmund and Iago are masterpieces of effective characterisation.

2. Begging-the-Question is not always a fallacy. To re-assert something which is felt to be true does not indicate a fallacious mode of thinking. But a redundancy is thereby introduced. Emotion is a kind of judgment which tips the scale of values heavily in one direction, an unfair procedure when one wishes to test the matter in as various and dispassionate a manner as possible.

true for all times and places. It might make assertions about the unknowable, basing its claims on a 'mystical, flash', but who can verify this? For instance the concept of God as an immanent, pervasive energy, which ordered most of the pantheistic poetry of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, does not stand up to analysis—yet poet after poet proceeded on the assumption that it was incontrovertible.

THE FOLLOWING ATTEMPTS AT CRITICISM ARE MEANT TO BE ONLY SUGGESTIVE, NOT EXHAUSTIVE.

The first example is taken from Matthew Arnold :

(1) Creep into thy narrow bed,
Creep, and let no more be said !
Vain thy onset ! all stands fast.
Thou thyself must break at last.

Let the long contention cease !
Geese are swans, and swans are geese.
Let them have it how they will !
Thou art tired ; best be still.

They out talk'd thee, hiss'd thee, tore thee !
Better men fared thus before thee:
Fired their ringing shot and pass'd,
Hotly charg'd—and sank at last.

Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
Let the victors, when they come,
When the forts of folly fall,
Find thy body by the wall. (*The Last Word*)

Critical analysis: The question of whether life, once lived, has been worth it or not is raised in many a summing up ; Prospero in *The Tempest* says that 'we are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded by a sleep', that it is an intense, ephemeral mirage. Tennyson answers that even dreams are real while they last, so life is not to be waved away as an empty bubble. Browning asserts the importance of the last stages of life in *Rabbi Ben Azra,* probably in reaction to Wordsworth's concept of the degenerative movement of life from birth to death, a concept with which Coleridge was also in agreement. We see Arnold's summing up above, in the same escapist, pessimistic tone which marks much of his elegiac poetry. Individual life

in conceived as a futile struggle against forces which must win. In the wrestling embrace of life and death it is always life which loses.

It would seem that his chief complaint is not against the fact of death which negates all that has been done in life, but against the apathy of his fellow-men to the message he had wanted to give them. They 'out-talk'd, hissed and tore' him for daring to attempt their reformation. In the world of values, society permits only mediocrity and views with suspicion any idealistic flight. Shelley voices similar frustration in his *Stanzas Written in Dejection*—the sense of dejection and futility which results when an idealist sets out to reform the world. Men are not willing to be reformed, society becomes hostile towards the man who gives it advice; and society always wins.

He realises that to attempt the impossible is absurd. After he has fired his shots, he expects a counter-attack by society and the 'forts of folly' to fall. But he wishes to make one more charge before he dies, the final act of noble dedication to a doomed cause. The old query of whether it is better to swim with the stream or fight against it is implied here. It is 'folly' to struggle against inevitables, but it is a noble kind of folly, and there must always be some who are willing to pit their puny selves against the overwhelming, visionless, disordered tide of philistinism. The poem ends on a somewhat ambiguous note of optimism.

There is a sustained metaphor of warfare. The lot of the idealist is to be at war and his end is defeat and death. The efforts of the individual are like pin-pricks on the hide of the leviathan, which will turn one day and crush the thing that irritates it. But there is fractional hope to be found in his despair, a hope that when the victors see the vanquished lying dead against the walls which they defended, they will be moved to consider that perhaps there was something worth defending, and in that moment, the idealistic struggle will be justified.

The quatrains have been written in the trochaic tetrametre. This gives a strong, heavily accented movement which is evocative

of the galloping of a horse, well-suited to the general metaphor of the piece. The imagery is unexceptional but the diction is commendably simple and lucid.

(2) Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yeild him shade,
In winter fire.

Blest, who can unconcern'dly find
Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night; study and ease,
Together mix'd; sweet recreation ;
And innocence, which most does please
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,
Thus unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie. (Alexander Pope,
(*Ode on Solitude*)

Critical Analysis : The thought in this poem has some correspondence with that of the previous poem in that it is an expression of the desire to sink into one's private shell and give up all ambition. It is a strange thought to have come from Pope, and in fact from any poet—because one of the dominant motives of poetry must be public fame ('Fame is the spur' says Milton in *Lycidas*) ; and if Pope desired anonymity, why did he bother to write at all, why did he take such a zestful part in the literary squabbles of his time, why was he so touchy when his public reputation suffered at the hands of rivals ?

These questions would not really be valid, because it is quite

possible for a man to have one thing and to yearn for something else. The sophisticated urban-dweller longs for the peace of the countryside, the farmer longs for the city lights. Pope talks about some 'happy man' who heir to a few acres of land, finds all his simple needs fulfilled directly from that land, milk from the farm cows, wheat from the soil, fuel from the trees which grow on it. The advantages of a completely bovine existence of almost complete inactivity and the total rejection of the ideals and pursuits which harry the average man, are enunciated here. Contentment, rather than possession or achievment, is correlated with happiness.

One might not agree with this. Pope is exhibiting yet further discontent in the very process of desiring a kind of life which is denied him. Since his lot was to be caught up in the hurly-burly of the literary world, could he not have shown some contentment with that lot? Or are the pre-requisites of contentment a 'few paternal acres' a rural existence, and a nature which is predis-posed to the vegetable life? One wonders if any farmer exists who, having all of his material needs supplied from his farm, would be content to let the' 'hours, days and years slide soft away' in an unproductive round of 'quiet by day, sound sleep by night'. This seems to be a bad case of pining 'for what is not', for a change in his external conditions (farm, sheep, cows etc) and in his internal conditions (contentment with an inactive life). One is tempted to argue that frustration, not peace, could be the only result of yearning for peace. But the frequency with which poets writing in both the romantic and classical modes sing in praise of solitude, makes one pause. This praise could hardly be a recommendation for the introverted, passive, struggle-free life, nor the depiction of an idyllic utopia where all is calm and free. It must be seen as the expression of a cyclic need within the poet's mind to' 'get away from it all', to give himself a holiday from the unceasing thwartations of the world of affairs, from making his futile assaults on indifferent humanity, from the cut and thrust of literary jealousies. Viewed in this light, this hankering after solitude makes sense. It is' escape' poetry, escape for the poet himself, not for all of us, though all of us recognise periods in our lives when we yearn equally for

some remote contentment. Cowper's *Alexander Selkirk* provides a contrast to this commonplace adulation of a state of solitude. The hero finds his exile wretched, even though he is 'monarch of all he surveys'.

It is of interest to see how the third and fourth verses have been joined by the use of a comma after 'day'. Pope has boldly introduced a running-on from one verse to another, and the effect is strange enough to shake us out of the pattern which had already been fixed in the first two verses. Monotony is effectively dispelled by this brief excursion after which he returns to the original pattern in the final verse.

(3) In wishing nothing we enjoy still most:
For ever our wish is in possession lost :
Restless we wander to a new desire,
And burn ourselves by blowing of the fire:
We toss and turn about our feverish will,
When all our ease must come by lying still :
For all the happiness mankind can gain
Is not in pleasure, but in rest from pain.

(John Dryden, *The Indian Emperor*, iv, i).

Critical Appreciation : This is another piece which posits the wisdom of inaction. The whole pattern of desire and fulfilment is self-defeating because once the desire is fulfilled the desire itself is no more and satiety results. A hungry man who eats is hungry no more, and the vacuum left by the removal of one desire is straight-away filled by another ; 'Restless we wander to a new desire, and burn ourselves by blowing of the fire.' It is better, suggests Dryden, to break out of the groove of desire and fulfilment, the feverish pursuit of excitement and stimulation. Comfort and happiness is the product of an acquiescence to life as it is. It is not in the pursuit of pleasure. seen as the temporary state of mind which results when a desire is fulfilled, but in the avoidance of pain. Pain can be avoided by a voluntary withdrawal from the world of false ambition and distorted values.

The traditional two sides of the argument are implied in these few lines. There are those who view life as a struggle, a bitter,

uncompromising struggle for the small gains which have marked man's slow, tortuous ascent up the mount of progress; and those who find a special wisdom in passive withdrawal; 'it is better to sit than to stand', 'goes an Indian saying,' better to lie down than to sit, better to sleep than to wake; but best of all it is to die.' What the first group of people would call progress—the acquisition of new skills and goods, of new knowledge and experience—would be negated by the second. Individual happiness is seen as the valid end of life, not the acquisition of property or the broadening of experience, which would be defined as materialism, the argument against which is that the world of matter is an illusion, or at best only a temporary phenomenon, and as such is bound to cause anguish and discontent.

The figure which depicts human discontentment as a fire is too common to merit attention. Dryden has kept to strict rules of simplicity, lack of inversion and prose syntax. The heroic couplets read off easily and there is no straining for meaning experienced by the reader anywhere. Unless we are to believe that the seventeenth-century pronunciation of 'most' was something like 'mosst', or that 'lost' was something like 'loast', there is no true rhyme to be found in the first couplet. The rhyme is to the eye rather than to the ear, and this seems to have become a valid procedure with the realisation that poetry was mostly read silently, not recited aloud.

(4) Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
Scarce can endure delay of my execution,
Wait, with impatient readiness, to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damn'd below Judas : more abhorr'd than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master,
Twice betray'd Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me :
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter ;
Therefore hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot! encompass'd with a thousand dangers;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors;
I'm called, if vanquished, to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
I, fed with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.

(William Cowper, *Lines written During a Period of Insanity)*

Critical Appreciation : It must be assumed that these lines, if written during a period of insanity, belong to a lucid moment within that period, because there is no sign of irrationality, much as there is of terror and emotional distress. It is the manic depressive's rock-bottom swing to the point when he feels the lowest depths of despair, when 'man disavows' and 'Deity disowns' him. One can well imagine how terrible the lot of a sensitive man could be, stigmatised and avoided by his fellows, abandoned apparently by God, who does nothing for the amelioration of his fate. The man is not evil but tainted; he suffers not for any sin but because a course is upon him. He is thus' twice betrayed' by his Maker, betrayed first In the moment of his making and then in the horrors which are visited upon him. And hell, which might have afforded some comfort by showing other people in comparable distress refuses to admit him. He cannot kill himself because this would be a mortal sin, so he is doomed to a living death, 'buried above ground'.

The special poignancy of the piece is brought home by the contrast with sinners who are punished much less than the innocent poet. Judas is less damned than Cowper; Abiram, who rebelled against Moses, suffers no more than a burial in the ground. The way in which Cowper has described Abiram's punishment is redolent of Milton's lines on Satan in *Paradise Lost* :

...Him the Almighty power
Hurl'd headlong, flaming, from the ethereal sky...

giving us an association between Abiram and Satan, the impli-

cation being that even Satan's punishment is a mild thing oom-pared to his own.

It is an immensely pessimistic outcry againstı a Providence which can punish innocent people more than sinners. It calls into doubt the whole complex of religious belief which is based on the assumption of a benign, moral God, and there is no letting up, no final re-assertion of his faith in the moral order. The poem ends on the realisation that he is doomed to ostracisation and enforced solitude, buried in his' fleshly tomb'. Those familiar with his *Alexander Selkirk* will remember how repugnant is the idea of solitude to Cowper, although in that poem there is an assertion of God's mercy towards the end. The theme is a recurring one with him ; in *The Castaway* the man deserted by his fleeing friends keeps himself alive for an hour before he succumbs. There is no succour, no reprieve.

The misery which informs this poem makes it specially moving. Here truly, is the tormented cry of one whose soul is under a great burden. The allusions in the piece are religious, so it is obvious that he has been praying as a last resort, and has found no respite in his prayers. God and God's justice are on trial here, and both have been found wanting for this man. The words 'justice', 'judgment', 'sentence' and 'execution' indicate the direction which his despair is taking in his madness.

As a first-hand document of the state of madness this poem has much to offer. 'Hard lot ! encompass'd with a thousand dangers ; weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors :'. We realise that this particular kind of madness is the result of emotional instability rather than of weak intellect. He is in a state of fear, the source of which might well be his loss of trust in the goodness of God. If the universe is ordered on principles of malevolence and injustice (as is quite easy to believe when one sees the world around one) then there is no hope and this loss of hope is the first twist in the degenerative spiral which leads to the pit of depression.

Yet, terror-stricken as he is, his expression is lucid and avoids morbid self-pity. There is something like irritation in his tone, the first sign of the will to fight back. One feels that his intellect has not suffered from the onslaught of his negative emotions, and that the bout of madness will be only a passing one.

The Eagle

(5) He clasps the crag with crooked hands ;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls ;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls. (A. Tennyson)

Critical analysis: This is a portrait of a bird which has always aroused the admiration of men for its qualities of strength and arrogance. It is a predator, which immediately entitles it to respect—such is the servility of our minds that we are always ready to praise the 'champon' or the 'hero.' Tigers and lions have always been accorded a kind of awed reverence as creatures of overwhelming power and complete cruelty—complete because no regret is visible in their behaviour, nor do they have to make any concessions to the possibility of counter-attack. The eagle comes into the same category, but with the advantage of flight, and habits which predispose it to a splendid isolation.

There is something godlike about this bird of prey which sits in its remote, lofty eyrie, watching the ground below, the sea so far down that its waves look like wrinkles. It sees a victim and falls 'like a thunderbolt' upon it—the destroyer is always related to the Creator in that he has at least one godlike attribute, and perhaps the more dramatic one. The fact of killing is an obtrusive one ; there is a morbid interest in the lives of conquerors and murderers ; there is a tendency to praise that which we fear, or that which symbolises our fear. The eagle is the perfect symbol of speed, strength, unassailability and cruelty. It watches, itself unseen, and

strikes suddenly and completely. It is an embodiment of the 'hidden danger' which lurks in the apprehensions of most men—the fear of the unknown, of the surprise attack which leaves no margin for the collection of one's defenses, fear of the force which makes no allowance for the morality or gentleness of its victims, as likely to destroy good as it is to destroy bad ; pitiless towards suffering, heavily endowed with weapons of offence and sublimely indifferent to reprisal. One is helpless in the face of such odds, and the tendency is to worship whatever symbolises this, be it god, man, beast or bird.

Tennyson's technique is masterly ; everything is implied in the few strokes of this portrait. The bird is honoured with the preposition 'he' rather than 'it'—the word chosen is 'hand' rather than 'claw' or 'talon'—he waits for the straggler or the weak member of the herd and becomes the tool of retribution, the swift, clean executioner upon whom no opprobrium falls because he is above these earthly matters himself. The very simplicity, brevity and directness of the poem implies a finality, an air of grand superiority which requires no exposition for establishing the fact. Criticism could do little to explain the poem ; all atempts at expansion would weaken rather than enrichen the effect.

(6) Extract from *Dedication to the Poet Laureate*

Bob Southey! You're a poet—Poet Laureate,
And representative of all the race;
Although 'tis true that you turn'd out a Tory at
Last,—yours has lately been a common case;
And now, my Epic Renegade! what are ye at?
With all the Lakers, in and out of place?
A nest of tuneful persons, to my eye
Like four and twenty Blackbirds in a pie;
'Which pie being opened they began to sing'
(This old song and new simile holds good),
'A dainty dish to set before the King,'
Or Regent, who admires such kind of food;—
And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing,
But like a hawk encumber'd with his hood,—

Explaining metaphysics to the nation,—
I wish he would explain his explanation.
(George Gordon Byron)

Critical Analysis : This is a fair example of satirical writing which employs a number of devices aimed at producing a kind of humorous contempt for the subject of the piece in the mind of the reader. Irony is one of the most effective devices in poetry : its titillating freshness gives one relief from the sometimes irksome burden of high seriousness and didacticism. Byron does not seem to take poetry too seriously here—the rhymes at the end of lines 3 and 5 are both offered in correspondence to 'laureate'; the effect is deliberately comic. This is to provide a contrast to the Lake poets, who certainly took their vocations as poets seriously. It also hints that, seious or not, the Lakers' were quite capable of demeaning their art for the sake of political advancement. Southey, who as a young man had been all in favour of individual liberty, who had questioned trinitarianism and the orthodox view of Christianity, had now become conservative, pro-British, pro-Royal and a writer of panegyrics to members of the ruling class. Wordworth had followed a similar pattern—the first enthusiastic support of the French Revolution and the rights of man, was lost in the tight, nationalistic orthodoxy of the older man. The third member of the group of 'Lakers', Coleridge, had rejected his early pantheism and his ideas of establishing a 'pantisocracy' (an ideal state where men would have perfect liberty in a kind of moral anarchistic order presided over by God as he was conceived of by these men) to become an orthodox member of the High Church. Liberty of thought and expression had been replaced in all three men by caution, and, at least in the cases of Southey and Wordsorth, Byron feels that the motive was worldly gain.

He cuts them down with stroke after stroke—Southey is addressed by the familiar 'Bob'—he has become a Tory at last, but this is nothing special because 'yours has lately been a common case'. The laureateship is held in contempt as a political appointment, so there is sarcasm in the way he tells Southey that he is representative of all poets. The grandiose 'Lake Poets', which would souud off connotations of a poetic school, is replaced with

the casual 'Lakers', a nest of tuneful persons who would like to place a dainty dish before the king or regent. He reduces their poetry to the level of a well-known nursery jingle, and the motive of their poetry to a status no more exalted than that voiced in this jingle; 'O what a dainty dish it was to set before a 'King' ; panegyrics to royalty with an eye on prestige appointments. Byron sees the Lakers as a tight group of mutual back-slappers, determined to secure vantage positions for the furtherance of their views. Coleridge (by the time this was written) had lost poetic impetus and was indulging in subtle metaphysics. The hawk was encumbered with his hood, the man of talent had lost his vision and was wandering aimlessly. His explanation of metaphysics was more involved and difficult than its subject, so he had become a spent force.

The younger group of romantics was generally at loggerheads with the older because of their caution and restrictive politics. They were in a position to jeer because the early lives of the older poets showed much which was inconsistent with their views later on—the great apostles of liberty had become tired, scheming old men who were now quite willing to compromise their consciences for material gain. Since all of the second group died young it is difficult to assess what they might have thought as old men themselves—perhaps the very attitudes and inconsistencies which they deplored in the Lake poets would have applied to them. It is possible to hazard an assertion that most men begin their lives as bold idealists and end them as cautious conservatives. Wisdom breeds a kind of acquiescance, ideals are replaced by tangible gains, a realisation comes that men in general cannot be moulded by any neat schematism, hence one's concern should be with the workable rather than the utopian.

(7) Music when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory—
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.
Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heaped for the beloved's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

(To——, Percy Bysshe Shelley).

Critical Analysis : This poem might best be understood in contrast with another by Shelley in which he says,' When the lamp is shattered, the light in the dust lies dead......When the lute is broken, sweet tones are remembered not', an assertion of the transience of an effect when the cause is removed. Now we have the opposite assertion, that the effect can outlive the cause, hence love will linger even after the object of love has gone away. The argument given by the poet is, 'I will remember you because it is in the nature of man to persist in his memories of worthwhile experience.'

We have little ground for disagreement with him, even when we are faced with truisms like 'out of sight, out of mind' and his own poem cited above. This is a love lyric and it is a common expedient with poets to invoke parallels and analogies garnered from the whole cosmos in order to explain and affirm their love. The absurdities must be overlooked because the motive which supplies their ingenuity lies in the equally absurd desire of the beloved for unending re-assurance on this point.

This little piece has the essence of lyricism. The continuous musicality depends somewhat on the dominantly spondaic character of the tetrametric lines, and also on the monosyllabic words which preponderate. There is a heightened regularity and symetry rather than the assymetrical regularity found in the iambic or trochaic line. The result is a forward-pressing movement which invites, almost, the spoken poem to break out into song. Like all songs, the music takes precedence over the words —one can think of it as a piece of music for which words have been written.

SOME ASPECTS OF ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

PLATO

Artistotle is usually considered vis-a-vis Plato. The latter suggested that if a poet were to visit a city-state, he was to be given every honour, offered every comfort for a while, and then banned because he was a potentially dangerous fellow. Other thinkers have argued that the poet is frivolous, inconsequential, a drone among honest workers, positively dangerous, immoral and heaven knows what else. None have succeeded in displacing him from his sometimes modest, sometimes exalted role, but as though danger to their beloved pursuit was being sensed by them, others have gone to the rescue. Aristotle is given the honour of defending poetry against the attack by Plato. He is usually positioned after him in critical histories as though his *Poetics* is a rebuttal of Plato. One cannot be certain that it is consciously just that ; Aristotle's motivation seems to be generally deeper than in the compulsion to give rejoinders to others. But Plato did savage the whole complex of art, and Aristotle did defend tragedy at least by its power to make men better for the sake of society and the political life, so we will follow the same pattern here. Piato's objections can be summarised as follows :

(a) Poetry is denigratory towards the gods and impious in tone.

(b) It indulges in violent emotions which result in violence and chaos among its adherents.

(c) It is a superficial human activity because the artist imitates someting which is itself an imitation. The only reality of 'bed' is an Ideal Archetype. A carpenter who makes a bed copies this Ideal Form. A painter who copies the bed made by the carpenter

imitates an imitation. Not only that, his imitation is incomplete and imperfect, his knowledge of carpentry is inadequate hence his instruction of others will be sketchy and faulty. His imitation of the bed is illusory because what he presents is not the bed but a cunningly contrived appearance of the bed.

(d) The poet may be inspired to high utterance but in a well-ordered state his words can only do harm. Political virtue being the end of all citizens of the city-state, anything which could cause disruption would be suspect. Plato regretted this deeply, confessing his own love for Homer. In the *Ion* he states that the muse inspires works of art—these are not the product of skill. Aristotle was to question this in his *Poetics* and *Metaphysics.*

(e) Poetry deals in falsehoods and is itself a kind of falsehood.

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PART I

The nature of tragedy is moulded by its purpose, according to Aristotle.

Purpose

This purpose is enunciated thus : 'to arouse feelings of pity and fear and effect a catharsis of these emotions'. Notice that the emotions which are to be purged are the same as those which are to be aroused. The method can only be described as homeopathic, that by causing the same symptoms as those displayed by the illness, a cure may take place ; that, by causing these feelings to boil over, the excess would be removed, The same idea is adopted by Ben Jonson in his so-called 'theory' of Humours.

Aristotle brackets 'pity' and 'fear' both in the *Poetics* and elsewhere.[1] At first sight they would appear to be diametrically opposed : 'pity' is normally seen as a positive, outgoing emotion, 'fear' as a negative, egoistic one. However, there are other traditional linkings of opposites, like 'love' and 'hate'. In fact it may be asserted that these opposites are only extreme manifestations of the same thing, *i.e.*, that 'love' and 'hate' are both the same emotion being expressed in disparate ways.

Aristotle certainly thinks this about 'pity' and 'fear'. They are the same in fact, though the attitude in either case is different ; we pity in others what we fear for ourselves.

Pity is the humanising emotion, fear is the trigger which sets off the action. Yet, neither is desirable ; Aristotle feels that by a regular purgation of these feelings, a general improvement will take place in the moral sensibilities of the audience

1. The matter has been discussed exhaustively in Humphrey House, *Aristotle's Poetics*.

so conditioned. Thus the 'habit' of morality can be helped and guided by a regular viewing of the right kind of tragedy.

Moral effect

In other words, the purpose of art is moral, and this purpose becomes its chief justification in the face of the damaging attacks made by Plato. The greater the morality induced by the tragedy, the greater is that tragedy. Aristotle proceeds to analyse the factors that go towards the making of this kind of tragedy.

Plot

Firstly, there is PLOT. This is the organisation of the action of the tragedy, and without it there is no coherence and hence no tragic effect. We notice a strong predilection towards cause-and-effect in Aristotle,[1] from which arises this insistence on continuity, plausibiltiy and visible links between various parts of the story. A fantastic, piecemeal jumble of incidents would be unlikely to arouse any pity fear feeling, or, in fact, any feeling other than confusion an irritation. Modern drama has sometimes ignored this rule deliberately, experimenting with so-called 'philosophies' of confusion or absurdity (the pictures 'La Dolce Vita', 'Muriel' and 'Eight-and-a-half', for example), but the experiments have not usually succeeded in finding consistent votaries. 'Character' is plot has sometimes been asserted about the productions of dramatists like Ibsen, that there is a kind of logical inevitability about the action which draws its inspiration from the characters rather than from the exigencies of story and situation. But we will observe a general movement away from plot towards character in the evolution of western drama, and the reason for this is obvious. Conditions during the hey-day of Greek tragedy were not conducive to characterisation ; plays were performed in the open in front of huge, often noisy crowds, lines had to be recited as loudly as possible, so that there was little

1. Aristotle's 'proof' of the existence of God is based on a hypothesis that every effect must have a cause. Since an infinite regress of causes would be intellectually unacceptable, therefore, there must be a first cause, etc. See his *Metaphysics* and *Physics*.

scope left for subtle variations of tone or voice, masks were worn, so facial expressions were useless, all actions were exaggerated so that realistic delineation was impossible. Since then, with the introduction of closed halls, good lighting and accoustics, the possibilities in this direction have improved immensely.

Even so, it is probable that Aristotle's observation still holds true. Character without plot would produce no drama: to bring upon a stage at the same time, Hamlet, The Wife of Bath and Agamemnon, each depicting his or her own character without having anything to do with one another, would result in a meaningless medley: but to have various personages performing actions under a co-ordinated pattern or plot, even if little attempt is made at characterisation, could result in drama of sorts.

The plot is a cause-and-effect succession, and clearly it has to be a limited one, otherwise the succession could continue to infinity in either direction. In presenting the life-history of some person, the dramatist is forced to confine his writings to a selected portion of that person's life. Aristotle's rule for making such a selection is that the action should have a beginning, a middle and an end; the beginning is that which is not obviously liked with some preceding episode, the ending is that which is not liked with anything coming after it, and the middle is that which is lined with both the beginning and the end.

We find that Aeschylus wishes to dramatise a single day in the life of Agamennon. The day selected is that of his death, coming soon upon the heels of his victory over Troy. Can it be said that the *last* day of his life is a proper selection for a beginning? Could it not be asserted that a whole series of circumstances taking place well before the event have led to his being murdered by his wife? Or in Ibsen's the *Doll's House* could it be claimed that the moment when the wife deserts her husband is the right moment for ending? Would there not be logical consequences to such an action?

The playwright is forced to leave a lot to the imagination of his audience. Aeschylus gives us a narration of events leading up to Agamemnon's death, so that even if the action begins almost at the end, a satisfactory background is filled in. And in Ibsen's case it must be presumed that what happens to either the husband or the wife after the end would really make separate stories. In other words, even in a single man's life, even if one event is dependent on another, there can still be separate events. There are certain moments in his life which mark changes for him, like marriage, vocation, travel, war, etc., and it is valid for the dramatist to select a series of incidents from one such marker to the other.

This is necessitated by the limitations imposed by the capacity of the audience to comprehend and sit comfortably through a dramatic porformance. If the play is too long, the audience will tend to forget the beginning and will not be able to conceive of it as a whole. If it is too short, it will have little impact and significance[1]. In other words the play's form and length are to be decided by the reactions and capabilities of the audience rather than the requirements of the story or the message which the playwright might try to put across. This is very much art for 'your' sake, in which everything is geared to produce a certain reaction.

The plot should be as significant as time and audience-appreciation will allow. The more massive the plot, the more telling will be its effect, and the greater the achievement of tragic magnitude. For the same reason, the plot should be complex rather than simple, allowing for richness and diversity of action within the main framework.

The Unities

The plot should have unity. This has been a point of discussion among critics, and it is now agreed that the only kind of unity on which Aristotle insists is that of action,

1. If the action is too small, its various parts cannot be perceived in relation to each other. Sufficient time must be allowed for the development of both good and evil and for the movement of one to the other.

which once again really means that the plot should have recognisable, plausible links leading logically from the beginning, through the middle, to the end. He has mentioned elsewhere that it would be better if the action of the play could be limited to the movement of the sun, which could be interpreted either as twelve hours or as twenty-four, but this statement, thrown off casually as a desirable value, should never have become an authority for the 'rule' of the unity of time, as it did later.[1] The third unity, that of place, can muster little support in Aristotle's text, but it is implict in the foregoing observations. Obviously, unity of place will make achievment of unity of action more easy. To have the conduct hopping from one part of the world to the other would break up the continuity as well as strain the credibility of the audience. Yet, against this, it is fair to state that both in matters of time and place, the audience is capable of stretching a point without effort. No sense of incongruity is felt when the whole life-time of a man is compressed into a performance three hours long, or if part of the action takes place in Rawalpindi and the other in Dacca, London or anywhere.

Peripety & Discovery

Two other elements are introduced as desirable additions to the plot. One is *peripety* or the ironic twist : the hero should be shown as expecting one thing and in fact gaining something else. The example given is that of Oedipus, who, in desiring to hear the truth about his antecedents from Tiresius, something which he probably thought would help him to peace of mind, brings about the tragedy which engulfs his whole family. The other is *discovery*, in which the identity of a person, hitherto disguised or hidden, is revealed to the other characters. Both peripety and discovery are within the action of the play, that is, the characters are

1. Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* has its characters announcing the time of day, thus ensuring that the audience will understand that the action is completed in one day. See also the prologue to this play, and Sidney and Dryden on this subject. Jonson and Sidney treat with derision the type of play which telescopes a life-time into two hours.

are expected not to have the knowledge which the audience has. The ironic twist in Oedipus is no ironic twist for the audience, which knows fully well what will happen. Likewise, unless the tragedist wishes to introduce an element of mystery into his play, a disguised character is only disguised for the other characters in the play, not for the playgoers.

Not much that is new is presented to the audience; mainly that which it knows already. The stories of Oedipus, Orestes, etc., were common currency among the Greeks and in going to the spring theatre they were not in any expectation of novelty. In fact one comic writer of this time wrote that the tragedian had a great advantage over the comedian, because the first used known histories while the second had to create and explain situations.[1] Where the background was known it was not necessary for the playwright to enter into tedious, time-consuming preambles. It also allowed him to be more flexible in selecting various parts of those histories for his play.

Also, there is something in the nature of man which makes him demand that with which he is already familiar. A little child will ask his parent to repeat a bed-time story which he has already heard a dozen times, a devotee of 'western' pictures will go again and again to see the stock characters of lean, hard Texans fighting their epic battles against the same odds, without any sense of strain or boredom.[2] There is a pleasure and easy acceptance of the known, akin to the pleasure at the recognition of a friend. There is a

1. See Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 30.

2. This does not assert that men cannot also desire novelty. An acquaintance had a terrifying preoccupation with *Hamlet* some years ago, having read it a hundred times, seen it acted either on the screen or by visiting companies, and talked about it incessantly. Now he has become a regular reader of science and spy fiction. Tastes undoubtedly change, and no amount of conjecture about the chemistry of our bodies can explain why. The need for stimulating newness seems to alternate with the need for a comfortable, secure sameness. The 'sameness' of tragedy has some parallel in the Shia mourning for the death of Imam Hussain during Moharram. No new fact of the incident is offered, but a recounting of the event is enough to bring about the intense response.

special kind of anticipatory excitement in waiting for the reaction of a man on the stage to something which is new for him but not for us. All this helps to build up the emotions in the audience so that by the time the unravelling of the play takes place the mixed bag of emotions contribute one to the other to cause the feelings of pity and fear to boil over and wash away.

Denouement

Then there is the unravelling, the *lusis*, or denouement of the plot. This is necessary because in it there is the rounding up of the action, the awarding of just punishments or graces, the clearing up of mysteries, and the application of the *telos*, or ending.

Character

Vital to the production of the tragic thrill, though secondary to plot, is CHARACTER. It is vital because in the Aristotelian analysis, the plot could only become functional when it was built up around a central character of a certain type. This type was to be male rather than female (unless she were to display qualities more normally associated with men), because the struggles and trials of tragedy somehow suit men better than women ; he was to be good rather than bad, or inclined towards goodness, for the simple reason that a bad man undergoing misfortune would not arouse any sense of pity, but only of satisfaction : he was to be of the nobility, to give greater importance to his actions and therefore increase the tragic impact : his tragedy was to brought on by a 'flaw' in his character, and this flaw was to be suited to his status ; pride, anger, stubborness, ambition, not pettiness, meanness and the like.

The Tragic Flaw

This tragic flaw or *hamartia* has a special function. It provides a cause for the tragedy, which is necessary if the andience is to accept the action as credible. Tragedy which takes place

for no reason would not satisfy the native sense of justice which works strongly in most men. Once again we see that it is the requirement of the audience which dictates the operative principles of the play. A cause has to be given, but if the cause is entirely satisfactory, then the misfortunes of the hero will be seen only as something deserved and just, and there will be no sense of tragedy. Hence the tragic flaw must be something relatively innocuous ; the cause must be a small one, the effect must be great. The vast cataract of tragedy is released through the small aperture of the hero's mistake or error of judgment.

The emphasis is on error rather than sin, on an act 'unskillful but not morally culpable.'[1] This does, however, raise the point that where a man is unaware of what he is doing, the sense of his having done wrong is certainly weakened. Ignorance of the moral law may be no excuse, but it is a strong mitigating factor. There may be occasions when the tragic flaw is not obvious, or where it may be argued that the hero had no choice, hence could hardly be held responsible for his actions. A case in point is *Oedipus* who is fated to do exactly what he does, so the fault, if any, would seem to be that of fate rather than of Oedipus. Clearly if a man cannot help but do what he does, he is not culpable, any more than a tiger is to be blamed for killing a goat and eating it : However, this is probably what Aristotle desires ; the audience should not blame the man for his downfall, otherwise there would be no pity for him.

Alternately, it may be said that is it an 'error' to be selected by fate for the burden of tragedy.[2] Fate, it is argued, singles out certain men for the heaping on of high tragedy. In Hardy it is the man who aspires, as it is in Marlowe. The old Greek vice of *hubris*, overweaning pride, invites the reprimand of fate. A man can only be good if fate permits him to be so ; conversely

1. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 39.

2. In his *Physics*, Aristotle pretty much rules out the operation of 'chance' as a completely random entity. He admits the possibility, instead, of 'incidental' causes which may not be visibly or obviously connected to the event.

if fate wills it otherwise even the best of men can only be bad. This offers some kind of explanation for Oedipus's calamities; although an unsatisfactory one, because it may be pointed out that the prophecies about his actions preceded his birth, so he never really had a chance.

A third interpretation is that there is a kind of cosmic order of tragedy, irrational and universal, which erupts every now and then, choosing its victims at random and without mercy. The tragic flaw merely becomes the open door through which it makes its attack. There are some kind of men who are so conditioned and pre-disposed that they are likely to make the wrong choice even when they have the option of doing something else. Such are the men who, despite the right of free choice, will embark unseeingly upon a wrong course. Socrates stated that once a man knew what was right, he could not make a wrong choice; Aristotle refuted this in his *Ethics*. It is quite possible for men to act wrongly knowing fully well what is right. Such actions would exclude injuries done to others unwittingly, or through ignorance or negligence, but would include violence committed underemotional stress and, of course, deliberate choice of wrongdoing in the face of the moral conscience and the promptings of society.

The question of intention is also relevant. If a man intended no harm but harm was caused, this would be no vice, even if the harm was great. Nevertheless this is an error—a frequent one if we remember the saying 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions', and a fit cause for tragedy. It cannot be argued that Macbeth may have had the welfare of Duncan's kingdom at heart, that he really thought by removing a weak king he would be doing good to the country. The fact is that his one action of murder brought down a whole flood of tragedy upon himself and his associates.

It is ignorance of particulars which matter. A *general* rule of hospitality to a tired traveller would be to offer him a glass of cool water, and the intentions in offering it to him may be the very best. But he may have a weak heart and die as a result, so it is *ignorance in this particular case* which causes harm, and

according to Aristotle, must involve pain and repentance, but is the kind of mistake that deserves pity and forgiveness.

Then there is the kind of error which invites wrongdoing by others. There is the 'victim' kind of character who brings out the dormant criminality in others. Lear might be shown to suffer no other fault than senile dotage, but he is ripe for exploitation by his evil daughters and even for rebuke by his good daughter. Tess in Hardy's novel demonstrates no immoral inclinations, yet her very passiveness invites disaster. The Greek hero is not shown as a passive stoic, but as a courageous, strong-willed character who fights back. Tragic stature is achieved in the struggle; it is the struggle which gives fibre and meaning to morality.

Remorse is essential for expiation. There must come a moment of reckoning and realisation ; only then is the circle drawn close, the moral cycle complete, the act of justice meaningful.

Ideally, if a man does ten paisa worth of wrong, he should be responsible for his action up to a price of ten paisa, and punished to a degree of ten paisa. If he commits some insignificant blunder out of ignorance and with no intention of doing so, he should be exempted from responsibility and punishment altogether. This is hardly ever so at a terrestrial level, but if the blunder is against the supernatural, then the consequences far outweigh the cause. The Ancient Mariner commits an outrage against the supernatural when he shoots the Albatros, an act of sacrilege towards God's creation, an English equivalent of the Jain doctrine of 'Jeu hathia'. The punishment is frightening.

It would seem, then, that the tragic vision would doom man to a repetitive round of blundering, suffering and expiation through martyrdom or death. The vision is infinitely more barbarous than the 'eye for an eye' dictum of the Old Testament ; fate demands more than just an eye in payment for an eye: it will take several eyes in return, and will involve all the family members and associates of the wrongdoer as well. If Hamlet's

flaw is indecision, why should innocent people like Polonius, Ophelia and Laertes be made to suffer? unless it is argued that *their* tragic flaw is that they are associated with a man who is already marked out by fate to be the centre of a round of tragedy!

We have seen that the tragic hero should display goodness, strength of mind and a tragic flaw. He should also be appropriate, that is a man suited to the situation, true to life, so that we can recognise him as a man and thus sympathise with him, and consistent. The last requires that we should be able to recognise him as the same man at the end of the play who is to be found at the beginning. This does not mean that his ideas and outlook should show no change; Hamlet before he leaves for England is confused and unsure of himself, calm and fatalistic when he returns to Denmark; Macbeth is a paragon of virtue before he murders his king, and a demon thereafter. Yet the changes which occur cause no inconsistency in the character—in fact, the changes are expected by the audience, so no incongruity is felt.

Thought

Third in the hierarchy of importance in tragedy is THOUGHT. Clearly its function is to provide a philosophic and thematic background for the action, so that the audience may be satisfied with what seems to be an explanation of what is going on. It cannot be called vital to the creation of the tragic impact, but there is no doubt that it helps. To have someone on the stage uttering well-worded versions of the eternal verities would certainly contribute to the aura of dignity which surrounds the play. There may be some significance in the fact that Aristotle has used the word 'dianoia' rather than 'noesis'; the first implies empirical, rational, and therefore limited thought, the second implies intuitive knowledge of the true form and ideas of the universe. The function of dianoia is really to create a foundation of plausible discussion for the action, rather than to voice eternal truths. This is in keeping with his general requirement of cause-and-effect plausibility as the basis for the plot. Dianoia can also contribute to the fulness and richness of the whole, and provide content for the operation of poetic diction

and rhetoric, essential for the elevation and dignity of the whole complex. It also permits the play to acquire a contemporary interest by introducing topical problems into the historical action. Thus Aeschylus has discussed the question of revenge and justice in his *Oresteian Trilogy*, a question which was relevant to the establishment of the areopagus and the court of elders as the dispenser of justice, in place of the oracle at Delphos or the constitution of the crude old principle of revenge.

Greek tragedy also exhibited diction, melody and spectacle as sudsidiary requisites. The niceties of Greek poetic diction need not concern us now. But its inclusion means that Aristotle conceives of tragedy as a work of poetic art[1] rather than a simple means of administering medicine to the masses. Melody and spectacle are pleasing additions, though they are not essential to the achievement of the tragic purpose.

These are the representative factors of successful tragedy—a character of a certain type (good, noble, true to life, appropriate and consistent, possessing a 'tragic flaw') acting within the framework of a certain kind of plot (plausible, possessing magnitude, complex,) produces a catharsis of pity and fear by arousing these emotions. To this general scheme may be added pleasurable embellishments like poetic diction, music and spectacle, although, says Aristotle, it is better to secure dramatic effect through the use of words than by the employment of mechanical devices and costumery.

Catharsis

There is some difficulty about this 'catharsis of pity and fear'. 'Catharsis' means a purgation or cleansing, and there has been considerable discussion as to what this might connote. In its denotative sense it would mean the effect produced by a strong aperient. Clearly, however, its application here is psychological rather than physical, although the old Greek idea of medicine

1. In fact, as the most effective form of poetry, exceeding the epic (which scores on points of magnitude, narrative and flexibility) because its effect is more concentrated, it is actually acted before one's eyes, and it possesses music and spectacle.

indulged in speculation about bodily 'humours' which were supposed to cause psychical and emotional dispositions. There might still be some people in twentieth-century Pakistan who would ascribe to the 'unani' system of medicine and its belief in humours, but the rise and fall of emotions would now generally be explained psychologically, not physically.

Also, there is a point to be considered whether the enjoyment of a tragedy is something which occurs *after* it is over, or actually during the performance. If people enjoy the feelings of pity and fear, why should Aristotle require that they be removed? and it they do not enjoy them, how is it possible that people will voluntarily go to the theatre and pay good money in order to have hurtful feelings aroused? Milton took the first view (in his advertisement to *Samson Agonistes*), that it is the peace which comes after the passions are spent which is the purpose of the playgoer, even if he is not conscious of that purpose. After all, there are many activities in human life where present pain is endured for the achievment of future pleasure. However, another view[1] is suggested by Butcher, that catharsis does not mean a washing away, but a purification of something which continues to exist within the psyche of the audience. It is an experience which edifies rather than removes. This view has one advantage; it enables us to understand how a man may keep on going to witness tragedy, because what has not been removed may be subjected to repeated purification, whereas what has gone for ever cannot be purged away again. For modern minds, also, it satisfactorily avoids suspiction of the 'homeopathic' method; it seems silly or unnecessarily complicated to fill up the soul with pity and fear when one wishes to eliminate these feelings.

1. Wimsatt and Brooks (see *Literary Criticism*, 37) do not feel that either view can be relevant to any discussion on the nature of tragedy, because both views talk in terms of what effect is achieved by tragedy, not what tragedy is. However, it would seem that the whole slant of Aristotle's analysis is conditioned by the psychology of the audience, so this kind of speculation may still be useful. Hardly anywhere can it be observed that Aristotle is professing an analysis of tragedy as a phenomenon isolated from, or indifferent to, the reactions of the audience. It is the audience/drama complex, the interaction between the two, which makes for the tagic experience. See the *Metaphysics, II.* : 'The science which knows to what end each thing must be done is the most authoritative of the sciences'.

If one does not desire water in a bucket, why fill it up with water ?[1]

It is not easy to dismiss Aristotle with these sophistries. The feelings of pity and fear are observed by him as undesirable and dangerous quantities within the human system, and it seems necessary that these be washed away regularly so that they do not build up and vent themselves in distorted and harmful ways. The implications are wider than the well-being of the individual; their import is social also. Hence the right kind of tragedy becomes a regulating device for man as a social animal. Observed fact, also, would establish that even after certain feelings have been cleansed away, they are likely to build up again. There is no permanent removal of emotion, but there can be a tempered, habituated cycle, and it is this 'habit' pattern which Aristotle concieves as the true foundation of moral behaviour, a pattern which can be fostered by the repeated viewing of tragedy.

As for the method, objections to the homeopathic method[2] might well be removed when we remember that in this system, pseudo rather than actual symptoms are induced. The feelings of pity and fear aroused in the theatre are synthetic and artificial, yet akin to what person would feel in real life. The element of real danger is removed, the participation in the action, no matter how intense, is vicarious and lacks immediacy. Continuing with the bucket analogy, if there is water in it already which we wish to remove, one way would be to flush it out with something else which looks and behaves quite like water, but which soon evaporates away so that the space is filled up by something which for a while seems to be something but which subsequently becomes nothing, thus leaving a clean bucket. The

1. Or if it already contains water which is causing trouble, why not tip it out rather than add more to it ? or apply some other neutralising expedient ?

2. A method which still has considerable currency in Pakistan. A commonplace wisdom in our society is that 'hot kills hot', a version of 'diamond cuts diamond' or 'a thief to catch a thief'. As far as our bodily processes go, a hot cup of tea on a hot day does seem to cool one more than a cold drink, while the after-effect of a cold bath in summer is often an uncomfortable warmness.

process of purgation takes place while the audience is watching the play ; artificial feelings are used to displace the real ones, and then when it is all over, the artificial ones also fade away and a special kind of calm is left.

Lucas's objection that no one would voluntarily go to a theatre to have disagreeable feelings aroused can be answered easily. Man's bent of mind is teleological ; end purposes are usually more important than present comforts; it is the cathartic relief[1] which takes precedence over the painfuf means to that relief. Statistics would show that there is a considerable clientele for the horror/thriller brand of picture. People want to be given a scare, without being in danger themselves, so that the scare will be removed. This is usually done in these pictures by giving them a happy ending, so that the impact of the horror is rounded off and ended, something which Aristotle also thought would be useful in tragedy. He does not advocate an unmitigated progression of tragedy to a calamitous finale full of dead bodies and tears. He feels, rather, that the reasonable, optimistic ending would be more effective. Once again, this is a recommendation tailored to the psychology of the audience ; let the viewer be dragged through a broad spectrum of emotions dominated by fear and pity but at the end let him go home with a knowledge that this tragic experience is over, that all is not negative and horrible and calamitous.

If this is Aristotle's standpoint, and it seems to be[2], the following statement must be rejected:

> The second or lustratory view is that adopted by Butcher in his influential essay. It connects more readily with normal modern views about the dignity of the tragic experience and its enlargement of our souls ; it is doubtless nearer to what most of us would like to say ......and to the truth. It has at least the advantage of

1. A case of the end justifying the means, of being 'cruel to be kind.' That Aristotle was firmly persuaded of the rightness of this principle can be assessed from statements in several of his writings.

2. See, also, H. House, *Aristotle's Poetics*, especially the chapter on catharsis.

making the enjoyment of tragedy occur while we are witnessing it rather than in a sounder sleep when we get home, a relief after emotional orgy. But both views concern after all not what tragedy says or what tragedy is so much as what tragedy may do to us: they lie rather in the realm of experimental psychology than in that of literary criticism. They treat 'pity and fear' as a reference to something in the audience rather than to something (scenes or elements) in the play......"[1]

Yet everything must be referred to that 'something' in the audience ; tragedy in the Aristotelian canon is not an entity isolated from the reactive mechanism of the audience, but is a cause fabricated in a certain way to produce a certain effect. *King Lear* in book form is not, by itself, tragedy; nor is it tragedy when it is enacted on the stage without an audience. It becomes tragedy only when it is acted before an audience. Aristotle appears to have scored one over some of his subsequent commentators by his awareness that all drama is relevant only to its audience and must be measured in terms of the effect it produces on that audience. Whatever slogans have been operating in this century, that art is impersonal and self-contained, that it is enough for it to 'be' rather than to 'do', etc., common-sense cannot be thrown aside for sophistry. Drama is a kind of art which achieves some dimension only when it is acted in front of an audience, and it is the requirement of the audience which is crucial both to the general shape of the drama and to its method of presentation.

What about reading a play? it is likely that the effect of reading, rather than hearing and seeing, is but a pale similacrum of what Aristotle desired[2]. The imagination could never supply

1. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 37.

2. It must be admitted here that Aristotle has stated otherwise in his *Poetics XXVI* : 'That Tragedy may produce its effect even without movement or action in just the same way as Epic poetry ; for from the mere reading of a play its quality may be seen'. This may have stemmed from his anxiety to establish the superiority of Tragedy, an anxiety which seems unnecessary and ill-founded. There is a difference between reading a play and seeing it performed on a stage ; the impact of the second is sharper, more positive and more immediate. Seeing something is better than reading it—sight is the sovereign sense, according to his *Metaphysics (I)*.

the variety and concreteness of action which a performance could, nor would it really be possible for the reader to be swept away into an action which has been reduced to a colourless succession of small, evenly-printed letters.

The general trend of argument appears to lead to a conclusion that catharsis must be viewed in the light of what it denotes, that is, as a cleansing and removal, not as a Hegelian synthesis producing an edification or purification through a clash of opposites, as Butcher hints. Pity and fear are not opposites, only different manifestations of the same feeling. Nor do they purge each other of emotionality or egotism.

Choice of Subject and method of Presentation

The foregoing comments might be said to cover the core of Aristotle's analysis. There are other interesting refinements, the most important being the choice of subject. His emphasis is on what 'might happen' rather than on what has happened and he clarifies further that the difference between the historian and the poet is not merely in the difference between writing prose or poetry. The writings of a historian might well be turned into verse, but the result would still be a species of history. The difference resides in this, that one describes what has been, the other what might be.

Poetry and History

Because of this, poetry is more philosophic than history ; its statements are universal rather than particular. Though tragedy allocates names to certain characters, they function in accordance with general truths, scientific necessities or logical probabilities[1]. Hence we find that in comedy names may be invented, but in

1. Aristotle argues that what is possible is also, surely, probable. What has occured in history is also quite possible else it would not have occurred. Even so, we are sometimes faced with the knowledge of events which make no sense as they stand—they have occured, they are possible, but they seem highly improbable. It is only when a philosophic historian or a good poet points out the links between apparently unrelated events that the story begins to make sense. The historian is forced to be more careful than the poet on this score, and is therefore less effective and convincing.

tragedy it is safer to adhere to historical characters, for the reason that what *has* occurred is obviously probable, and it is the probable which convinces.

The Probable & the Possible

Even more important than the possible is the probable, by which Aristotle means the logically plausible. The evidence of design must be there, like in the story of the boy who is gored to death by a bull after he has himself been killing insects by piercing them with pins. The fortuitous improves with the hint that there is an over-riding metaphysics. The audience will be more inclined to accept it if there is some indication of a plan.

Thus, a story does not have to be factual to be acceptable. It is enough if it is plausible and probable. The objection that poetry deals with 'lies', events and characters which do not occur and exist (or 'fiction'), is well answered here. These charaters do not need to exist, nor do those events need to take place: all the requirements of successful art are covered in the process which permits us to recognise the validlity of the characters and the probability of the events. The historian merely recounts what did happen, the poet shows what must happen. The dramatist is really free to invent names and events in tragedy also, as in comedy. The voluntary limitation to a few subjects in Greek tragedy is because, firstly, they had recourse to only a small number of historical anecdotes which displayed the necessary requisites, secondly, because the repetition of known themes had a certain dramatic advantage, thirdly, because of the religious overtones of these themes. The stories were connected with ruling families who were supposed to have derived their right to rule from the gods, and who were therefore somewhat godlike themselves. Through all this, it was still the 'probable impossibility' which succeeded more than the 'improbable possibility', the logically inevitable rather than the actual.[1]

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1. There is the question of the 'willing suspension of disbelief', as this phenomenon in the psychology of the audience was described by Coleridge. Our minds are so conditioned or constituted that when we approach the whole field of art there is a voluntary removal of our demand for facts. However, there is never a removal of our demand for plausibility. The giving of a reason, no matter how fallacious this might appear subsequently, always succeeds more than the giving of a fact.

Certain kinds of incidents work better than others upon us to produce the required reaction of pity and fear. Pity would be aroused by the spectacle of suffering on the stage, provided the the situation under which the protagonist suffers is of the right kind. Mere pain would produce a transient reaction of pity in the event of an enemy inflicting that pain upon an enemy. If the wrong deed is worked upon another by a man who is indifferent to that other, the reaction once more is transient, extending only to the contemplation or the actual doing of that wrong deed. But if there is a relationship between the wrongdoer and the wronged, the situation becomes more poignant. Hence there is a strong preference among the classical tragedists for stories in which family members are involved. Aristotle applauds this but points out that while the old stories should be retained unchanged, there is still some leeway for speculation by the poet himself. It is his responsibility to treat the stories in the right manner which means most likely that the poet should give the stories universality and plausibility. Also, some situations have more of the tragic potential in them than others. The wrongdoer may be well aware of what he is doing, or he may be in ignorance, or he may meditate upon the possibility of doing it but discovers the identity of the victim and draws back in time to prevent the tragedy[1]. The 'worst' (by which he means the 'least tragic') situation is when the wrongdoer is on the point of harming his victim, knowing fully well who he is, is either prevented from doing it or draws back. Better than this is the situation of ignorance since there is no feeling of hostility aroused in the audience by the commission of the wrong deed, and the discovery

1. W. Hamilton Fyfe (*Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, 38, n4) claims that Aristotle has overlooked the fourth possibility of a man, knowing the identity of the victim, meditates but does not do the injury, e.g. Abraham and Isaac or Hamlet finding his uncle at prayer. However, Aristotle has probably not overlooked anything here. What he has been guilty of is some looseness of sequence in his categories. The fourth alternative is stated thus (see Fyfe, 39): 'The worst situation is when the person is with full knowledge, on the point of doing the deed, and leaves it undone.'

serves to 'astound us'.[1] Best, however, is the situation of ignorance which leads to the point of the wrong deed, but which provides for a reprieve at the last moment through the discovery of the identity of the victim.[2]

Not enough has been said about this aspect of Aristotle's analysis. Let us take the example of *Agamemnon*. The hero is killed by his wife soon after he returns from the Trojan wars, the reason given is that he sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia before sailing on the expedition in order to secure favourable winds. Clytaemnestra, his wife, feels that she is duty bound to extract a just revenge. Is the tragedy in the death of Agamemnon? if so what is his tragic flaw? A simple death cannot be rated as tragedy, especially if that death is deserved, as it is for a man who would without conscience sacrifice his daughter for the sake of a war.[3] Nor is there any flaw, because he is more clearly guilty of a sin. There is little in his characterisation by Aeschylus which invites our sympathy. He is shown as arrogant and boorish, weak and self-indulgent.

Keeping Agamemnon in mind (and he is professedly the hero of this play) one wonders where any of Aristotle's precepts come into operation. The hero is a churl and killer whose only claim to exception is that he has managed to win a very expensive war. He is a man, a king, but he displays less of the man-like qualities required of a hero than does his wife. He is conceited to the point of denying the credit of his victory to the gods. If Clytaemnestra is the 'hero', how does she suffer, and is not her own death at the hands of her son (revenge for the murder of his father) justified?

1. An example of 'discovery' used for its effect on the audience.

2. An example of 'discovery' used as a device in the plot.

3. It is possible to partially exonerate Agamemnon because he is forced by circumstance and a fear of the gods to do this. Somehow, the whole story of Iphigenia is unsatisfactory : after being sacrified she appears re-incarnated as a priestess hence the sting of the sacrifice is removed. In one version, as a combined sister with Electra, she motivates Orestes to take revenge on their mother for the murder of Agamemnon. This seems strange since it was their father who had wronged her.

The principle of revenge, crude justice as it is, would demand that Agamemnon be made to pay for the murder of his daughter, and would also demand that Clytaemestra be killed in her turn by her son. This happens in either case so there is a deficient sense of tragedy.

This is a case where the wrongdoer, knowing the identity of his victim, both meditates and commits the deed of horror. In Aristotle's categories, this situation is just slightly better than the 'worst' situation cited earlier.

The plot of *Agamemnon* is simple rather than complex: there are no peripeties, no discoveries and no sufferings. Yet despite a whole series of disqualifications, this play enjoyed a tremendous reputation with its companion pieces in the trilogy.

On Oedipus & the Tragic Flaw

Or take *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, apparently Aristotle's favourite. Despite what has been said in an attempt to allocate some kind of fault to Oedipus, the matter remains unsatisfactorily open. To talk in terms of 'it is a fault to have a bad fate' is really to talk nonsense. A man cannot select his fate any more than he can select his parents, hence his own responsibility in the matter is removed. *Oedipus* scores on all other points in Aristotle's canon, but here the play is unsatisfactoy. Why does Oedipus suffer? because he is the son of Laius—this is no fault of his; because he is impatient and bad tempered?—his temper has little to do with the action because whether he wills it or not, whether he is uncontrolled in his rages or not, he is bound to fulfill a prophecy ; because he does not attempt to reverse the course of his fate?—but can he? he even runs away from home to escape the curse, but do what he will, he lives out his destiny. One explanation runs thus, first referring to a passage in Aristotle's *Ethics*:

> 'Again one might think one's son was an enemy, as Merope did, or that a pointed spear had a button on it, or that a stone was pumice stone ; or one might give a man a draught to save, and really kill him; or

one might want to touch a man, as people do in sparring, and really wound him.'

"Or—if we may take a very slight liberty of interpolation—one might meet an old man and his retinue at a cross-roads, fall into an altercation and end by killing them all—and one might be ignorant that the old man was one's father. Or might serve the people of a foreign state by solving a riddle and one might be rewarded with the hand of their queen—and one might be ignorant that the queen was one's mother ......"[1]

This is all very well ; ignorance is a fault, but one feels that Oedipus was fated to remain in ignorance, so the whole thing as a dramatic 'reason' becomes weaker. The only fault which can really be discovered is that Oedipus was born with a bad fate, something which had nothing whatsoever to do with his own capabilities or mistakes. The writer goes on to say:

"......the tilt in emphasis is towards a responsibility, which though it could never have been satisfactorily discharged, Oedipus was yet not free to evade. If on the one hand Oedipus is predestined to destruction, on the other hand, the particular time, features, and fullness of his suffering are determined ironically by the kind of militant scepticism which he shares with his mother, and by his own violent efforts to get free. The rashness which may be traced in his early actions—the flight from Corinth and the murder of Laius—only prefigures the hasty, ill-tempered, and irreverent steps of his inquisition on the day of his downfall."[2]

Yes, but no matter how much the colour of the play is affected by Oedipus's rashness and ill-temper, the cause of his downfall is his ill-fate, not his ill-temper. One feels that even if he were a gentle, humane character, the prophecy would have

1. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 43.

2. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 44.

been fulfilled. The trend of the foregoing argument is that Oedipus's punishment has not been strictly determined by his sin, which is of course, exactly as Aristotle would have it. But what sin at all does he commit *before* his doom is writ? his rashness and aggressiveness are qualities, deplorable no doubt, which come *after* his evil destiny has been fixed, so they cannot be viewed as flaws which cause his destruction. The cause-and-effect pattern is not given satisfaction, and there is nothing else which justifies the inclusion of a flaw in an otherwise noble character.[1]

Who is the object of our pity ?

One other matter is not clear in these categories given by Aristotle. When one party perpetrates a deed of horror on another, is the tragedy to be associated with the victim or with the wrongdoer? clearly it is the victim who suffers, so normally it should be he who is the centre of tragedy. Yet this is not true of many tragedies which are, nonetheless, effective. Clytaemnestra in *Agamemnon*, Orestes in *Choephorae*, Iago in *Othello*, Macbeth and others. Hamlet is the wronged rather than the wrongdoer, so some of this is understandable. So is King Lear (more sinned against than sinning). Still, we are entitled to ask, are our sympathies to be extended to Oedipus for becoming blind after he has become a king, or to Laius for being murdered by his son, or to Iocasta for losing one husband and then entering into unwitting incest with another? is our pity to be felt for Duncan who is murdered in his sleep, or for Macbeth who murders him?

The questions raised have some relevance. The bulk of authoritative commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* so far has treated the character of the hero as the recipient of our pity and the cause (within the plot) of our fear. Being the most important figure, our feelings tend to crystalise around him. But this

2. One wonders for what 'flaw' Romeo and Juliet suffer, and whether a lack in this respect weakens the Tragedy. 'Love' could hardly be seen as a flaw, even when that love is caught in the absurdities of factionalism. Yet perhaps a case could be made—love is the dominant Christian virtue, but only when found within an approved frame of discipline. A love which ignored its effect on the other members of the warring families could be viewed as a flaw.

is perhaps not exactly as Aristotle intended that his statements be interpreted. Where there is a figure as dominating as Hamlet's, there is little strain felt in allocating most of our important feelings to the hero. But where there are secondary figures who are almost as powerful as the hero or who exceed him, then it is surely the sum of all the pities and fears, applied to several characters, which marks the effect of the play.[1]

The tragic flaw makes the avalanche of tragedy rational, or partly rational, in the hero's case. However, nothing is given in explanation of the sufferings of the hero's associates, which would leave the audience with a vague sense of uneasiness and dissatisfaction. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle stressed the need of the human mind to know the 'why' of things. The answer is given more easily in Greek tragedy than in later English tragedy. Sometimes a whole household would be cursed. which meant that all the members of a family would suffer for the misdeeds of one. Also, there was the reasoning which made the dependent members sink or swim with the fortunes of the head of the family, or at a social level, the head of the state. It would not have seemed unjust to a Greek audience that Oedipus suffers because of the sins of his father, or Iocasta because of the sins of both of them. A curse had been pronounced on the house of Laius, and this curse would continue to operate on several generations until it had worked itself out.

Otherwise, this conception of tragedy would be a depressingly morbid one, and perhaps not very true to life as we know it. Sometimes, without a doubt, trivial causes lead to a terrible complex of misunderstanding and suffering ; but at other times equally the most heinous sins go unnoticed by fate and retribution. This far it could be asserted that the pessimistic vision of Providence in Greek tragedy could only instil in the minds of its audience a helpless fatalism in the face of a force which seemed to be

1. Even in *Hamlet*, greater pity would often be felt for Ophelia or Polonius than for the Prince himself. In *Macbeth*, little sympathy could be extended to the hero, although this could be extended in large measure to his victims. Similarly in the old Greek plays, the 'pity' of the audience is not always focussed on the hero. In *Oedipus the King* it is Iocasta who suffers most for no reason at all, other than that she is a member of an accursed household.

irrational, malignant and untrustworthy. Yet only this far, because Aristotle insists on a satisfactory denouement (the plot is divided into the early part, called the *complication*, and the later part, called the *denouement*) which should rise logically from the previous events and from the characters of the play. The kind of denouement which employs 'machinery' (the intervention of the gods or other supernatural powers) for the explanation of the early complications, is inferior to the first kind.

Poetic Justice

The denouement is crucially important. Within it comes the reunions, the openings of mysteries, the recognitions, the explanations and the sentiments which cause the onset of catharsis. The logic and structure of the play demand that good be rewarded, even if the reward is no more than a kind of martyrdom, and that evil be punished. Hamilton Fyfe remarks:

> 'Aristotle is realist enough to recognize that clever villains often escape free. But when we see them worsted in a play, our human feelings are satisfied and we have a delicious sense of "poetic justice"[1]

The basic purpose of this correct apportioning of justice in the play may well be to provide this 'delicious sense' : but it is also likely that it is used in conjunction with the happy ending (which Aristotle prefers for tragedy) to counteract the ill-effects of the early part of the play. 'Danger averted at the last moment' combined with 'just rewards and punishments' would succeed more in its moralising effects than an unrelieved degeneration to some point of no return. The latter would be odious, oppressive and demoralising.

The whole is a system of checks and balances, finely controlled excesses and judiciously administered antidotes.

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1. W. Hamilton Fyfe, *Aristotle's Art of Poetry, 52n1.*

PART II

Some of Aristotle's comments on the language of poetry deserve attention. His analytics in chapter 20 are rightly passed over by commentators like Hamilton Fyfe as being meaningless to us now.[1] Perhaps one detail may be included here, Aristotle's definition of a syllable :

> 'A Syllable is a nonsignificant composite sound, made up of a mute and a Letter having a sound (a vowel or semi-vowel) ; for G, without an A, is just as much a syllable as GRA, with an A.' ;

which might be of use to a person engaged in the business of scanning poetry.[2]

'The perfection,' he says, 'of diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean'. Within this balanced statement lie the seeds of many a subsequent controversy as to whether the language of poetry is something peculiarly its own, or whether it should endeavour as far as possible to model itself to prose as used by the common man, a prose which would not be distinguished by the use of a wide vocabulary or strange words and constructions. Apparently it should be a kind of common prose which is heightened nonetheless by 'strange words, metaphors, lengthened forms and other deviations from the ordinary modes.'

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1. *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, 55, n3.

2. It is the minimal, single sound. Words in oriental languages make much use of the neutral vowel which is not written. The name 'Najam' shows two vowels when written in English, but its Arabic version would be 'N-J-M'. Some single vowel words would develop extra syllables depending on the way they are used. The imperative 'Now!' is spoken different from the interrogative 'Now', the second being a dipthong or nearly two syllables. 'Goodbye' would be one syllable followed by a tight dipthong in British English, but almost three syllables when spoken by an American.

The entire use of poetical deviations would render a statement unitelligible and barbarous: conversely, the entire elimination of these deviations would render it inconsequential and mean. The ideal is to achieve an effect which is at once comprehensible and elevated. The use of an odd foreign word in a statement can give it the dignity of learning, but to make that statement in a medley of foreign words would, even if the audience were in a position to understand it, result in absurdity. So also, an occasional change from the prose rhythms of speech would be refreshing, but an entire change would be tedious and the effect ludicrous.

An ability at metaphor is rated top among the attributes of the poet; it is something which cannot be learnt from others, whereas inversions, versification etc., can. Herein lies the true test of poetic genius because it indicates the perceptive ability of the poet. It is the product of a mind able to discover the middle term of a syllogism.[1]

If genius is no more than the scientist's ability to draw inferences and discover links, applied to images, a lot of what we had come to expect of the poet from Plato, as a man driven to emotional utterances by a kind of frenzy, has to be eliminated. Good poetry becomes the application of cleverness rather than of inspiration; Aristotle has sometimes been accused of dry pedantry on this score. He certainly seems to have missed what critics conditioned by nineteneth-century romanticism would call the 'soul' of poetry, that vaulting blend of thought and feeling which results in spontaneous utterance of far greater power than could be achieved by a carefully calculated insertion of heightening words and clever metaphors. The 'natural' would have

1. Aristotle states firmly in his *Psychology* that there is no sixth sense, what we would call intuition. He admits the existence of imagination which is the ability to see relationships between perceivable phenomena could be cited as a man with this abiliy in high degree. It is the same faculty employed by the man of science and the inventor of machines, and probably corresponds to what Coleridge called the secondary imagination.

more in it of the primordial power to move than the calculated: even so, who would deny that the metallurgist who carefully measured the ingredients he used to create a rare alloy would produce something more consistently useful than another who proceeded by some inspirational hit-or-miss method? perhaps out of a hundred brews the second would create something more exciting than the first, but in terms of usefulness the first must take the honours. If the *Poetics* is a book of instruction to budding dramatists, as Hamilton Fyfe asserts convincingly,[1] then just about all that analysis can achieve in this field is to be found here:

> 'Aristotle tells his class what to seek and what to avoid in the contruction of poetic dramas ; what is the effect at which such dramas aim ; how the achievment of that aim determines the form of the drama ; by what means that aim is achieved and by what defects a dramatist may fail to achieve it ; what are the charges which critics bring against poets and how such charges may be countered."[2] ;

and, if to our minds there is still room for the operation of intangibles, intuition, inspiration and divine guidance, we must admit nonetheless that perhaps that which seems to us to be the product of high, unfettered genius is but the effect of many carefully administered causes. The causes may not be visible, hence we are likely to accept the effect as supra-causal, but this may be erroneous. This much is certain ; were we to turn out a tragedy based strictly on what Aristotle has prescribed, using the kind of diction he has recommended, we would probably

1. *Aristotle's Art of Poetry* xv. However. George Watson, *The Literary Critics*, thinks that Aristotle is descriptive rather than prescriptive, that he is making a close analysis of existing forms in tragedy, not laying down rules for future dramatists. There is usually some evidence of purpose in Aristotle, and it is difficult to believe that the sole purpose of this analysis is to contribute to knowledge, worthy as such a purpose might be. To have knowledge without applying it would seem to run counter to the visible strain of pragmatism in Aristotle's nature. It is best to view it as a piece of guarded, non-limiting didacticism which has been based on careful induction.

2. Ibid.

succeed in securing the tragic effect, even if high genius were conspicuously absent from the production.[1]

The *Poetics* deals predominantly with tragedy. One, possibly two, more books existed which have not been preserved. His statements on comedy, which he relegates to an inferior class, do not reveal much in the way of interesting analysis.

> 'As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse however not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a blunder or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain'[2].

There is, in the *Tractatus Coislinianus* (a 10th century A. D. manuscript in the De Coislin collection at Paris), a definition of comedy which has obvious parallels with that of Aristotle on tragedy:

> 'Comedy is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect...through pleasure and laughter effecting the purgation of the like emotions.'[3]

Once again, if we are to accept this *Tractatus* as a commentary on those of Aristotle's writings on Comedy which were extant at the time but which are lost to us now, we see that it is to remove the same emotions which are aroused. Strange it seems indeed that Aristotle would require the removal of pleasure and laughter as though they were dangerous to the mentality of man. Wimsatt and Brooks[4] point out that both Aristotle and

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1. Actually, Aristotle does not deny inspiration altogether. See the *Poetics*, *XVII* and the *Rhetoric III*.

2. Ibid., 13.

3. Taken from Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, 46.

4. Ibid.

Plato thought of laughter as a dangerous emotion, hence the catharsis of laughter would be socially and politically desirable. The general trend in Aristotle's *Ethics* is to treat happiness as a concommitant rather than as an end:

> 'A consideration of the prominent types of life shows that people of superior refinement and of active disposition identify happiness with honour ; for this, roughly speaking, is the end of the political life.'[1]

Happiness is something different from pleasure, in the man of refinement ; it is associated with a more permanent state of feelings produced by a condition of honour and virtue. Pleasure is what the common man relates to goodness:

> 'To judge from the lives that men lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some ground) to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure which is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment ...Now the mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes, preferring a life suitable to beasts'[2]

from which we are entitled to infer that Aristotle thougat little of the pleasure-seeking, amusement-motivated activities of the great majority of men. Hence, if comedy can succeed in effecting a catharsis of this kind of pleasure and its accompanying laughter, it may be looked upon as a desirable literary genre.

However, we are in no position to determine whether the *Tractatus* has cited Aristotle as an authority on the subject or not, so all speculation has to be indefinite. One awkward corrollary of the foregoing is that, treated this way, comedy could have no meaning for men of refinement, because they are already free in large measure of this vulgar kind of pleasure. It can only be applied as a means of periodic therapy to the masses to prevent their vulgarity from becoming too deeply embedded.

There are interesting alternatives to the above, although these, too, must remain uncertain. Aristotle was not always in

1. *Nicomachean Ethics* (trans W. D. Ross), V.
2. Ibid.

opposition to Plato, so he may have extended some of the latter's ideas about comedy, namely, that it supplies incidents and characters which pander to our need to feel superior to others[1] and to the amusement, itself malicious and ungenerous, which is derived from this feeling. In doing so it satisfies a need and dissipates dangerous accumulations which might otherwise take place because of the continual frustration of that need. In viewing the antics of characters who are obviously our inferiors either in wit or foresight, appearance or fortune, we are filled with a comfortable feeling of optimism with regard to ourselves. Pleasure and contempt can be diametrically opposed to pity and fear (the contempt is not of the supercilious kind, but of the kind associated with the response 'how absurd!'). But the polarity is of the same general emotion—we are frightened when there is danger, pleased when there is none ; we pity another when he is shown in geniune suffering, we are contemptuous when we realise that there is no suffering in absurdity as practised in an unreal world on the stage.

In tragedy the auditor is made to feel that it could happen, that 'there, but for the grace of God, go I'. The treatment is realistic, the plot is plausible, the character is true to life, the whole emphasis is on a verisimilitude which sweeps the auditor along with the action, immerses him in the emotions and dangers of the play, purges him and sends him home a sadder and a wiser man. In comedy there are limited 'types' rather than characters, the situations are improbable, and the emotions involved less compelling. In comedy one part of the mind is left free to observe, so that participation in the action is relatively incomplete. In tragedy one 'feels with' ; in comedy one 'laughs at'.

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1. Wimsatt and Brooks, 45. Plato in the*Philebus* (48-50) had thought the comic response a kind of malicious joy or emotion of self-enhancement at the spectacle of obnoxious characters (those who in real life could hurt us) made innocuous on the stage.'

This is one point which rings true of comedy. One may be quite sure that most people secretly enjoy the misfortunes of others, even when their sympathies are aroused. When those others are obnoxious, the enjoyment is acuter, and no longer secret.

There is the sense of relief felt when witnessing a situation which has the potential of becoming tragic, but which is rendered harmless. Aristotle mentions this as desirable in tragedy also. But even if there is to be a happy ending in tragedy, the treatment, tensions, misunderstandings and suffering must be strong and real to that point. *The Tempest* opens with potential tragedy ; a grievously wronged man is shown in a position to extract a terrible revenge. In Aristotelian terms this play could be described as a tragedy if the audience were not made aware of Prospero's intention to use his supernatural powers to re-assemble the lives of those about him. All sting is taken out of the suffering of the characters because the audience is made party to the plot. The audience can sit back relaxed, to anticipate the satisfactory ending. So this is no tragedy.

In simple terms, men require sometimes to be frightened by the hint of terrible happenings, so that the world of reality to which they will return shall seem more palatable to them (as in tragedy), and sometimes to be reassured by the spectacle of absurdity in which the dangers they undergo in the real world seem innocuous and trivial (as in comedy). Both temporary removals from the real world achieve a calmer outlook after the return, by contrast or by comparison.

Evolution

It is usually accepted that Aristotle provides the first instance of evolution in art in his *Poetics*, a concept which continued unchallenged in the West till the early twentieth-century.

> 'It certainly began in improvsiation—as did also Comedy; the one originating with the prelude to the Dithyramb, the other with the prelude to the phallic songs, which still survive as institutions in many of our cities. And its advance after that was little by little, through their improving on whatever they had before them at each stage. It was in fact only after a long series of changes that the movement of tragedy stopped on its attaining to its natural form. (1) The number of actors was first

increased to two by Aeschylus, who curtailed the business of the Chorus, and made the dialogue, or spoken portion, take the leading part in the play (2). A third actor and scenery were due to Sophocles. (3) Tragedy also acquired its magnitude. Discarding short stories and a ludicrous diction, through its passing out of its satyric stage, it assumed, though only at a late point in its progress, a tone of dignity.'

Although this account of the origins of tragedy is subjected to considerable doubt nowadays, it is interesting because it implies, in its biological analogy, that what grows must also die. Its 'natural form' having been attained, there is clearly no room for further growth, and no new avenue for exploration is suggested in the*Poetics*. The period of development must be followed by a period of decay, so it is not to be expected that any art form could be permanent or perfect. Evolution (or in rare instances, its opposite) seems to explain the process so easily that one is surprised to see objections raised to it. History would seem to support it with its cyclic movements in art ; so would the order of the world around us, the rise and fall of dynasties, civilisations, empires.

Some saw the process as one of continual decay, like the Grimms in the eighteenth-century and Peacock in the nineteenth. Poetry is supposed to have started as a naturally forceful phenemenon and than degenerated over the centuries into something artificial and spangled, lacking vigour and substance. This would be Aristotelianism in reverse, but an admission nonetheless of the principle of change and evolution. But whether going up the grade or down it, whether it can be known when the top or the bottom has been reached or not, all this implies the idea of continuity, a sequence of cause-and-effect proceeding to an end effect. Hegel first broke this sequence by suggesting that the dynamics of change were constituted in pyramid formations which caused a jerky progression through antitheses and syntheses. (Now, of course, following Eliot, there has been a trend towards anti-historicism. Time is no longer conceived as a

medium through which events move in some causal pattern, but as timeless, so that there is no past and present in literature, no cause-and-effect, and therefore no evolution.)

The idea of evolution subjects any literary genre to a number of restrictions. Just as in Darwinism, it is suggested that some general principle like 'the survival of the fittest' serves as a guide-force, modulator and selector, so also in tragedy is some directing, conditioning force postulated. This force is the purpose of tragedy, which has already been discussed. Under the heavy hand of this purpose little more could be expected of tragedy than has been described in the *Poetics*. One might well ask if his account of the purpose of tragedy is not unduly inhibitive. Few indeed have challenged him on this score; most of those who have attempted improvements on his general scheme have shifted the emphasis away from the domination of the plot to that of character or diction, and perhaps, reading it this way, there has been little real evolution since Greek times—greater richness of thought, occasionally more excellent examples of poetry, superior characterisation, more sphisticated techniques for the production of spectacle, but in essence still conditioned by the basic purpose which is to produce a certain cathartic effect resulting from the tragic thrill, the salient constituents of which are still pity and fear.

Evolutionary forces do not end with the imprinting, shaping manipulations of a general design. The purpose of tragedy is really externally orientated, and dictated by the psychology of its audience. But can we not find any internal forces, those which grow out of its own nature? in Aristotle there is no hint of such forces ; it is the gradually improved version of basic forms, the improvements having been added from the outside, not evolving from itself. Art as an exalted entity, existing by virtue of itself rather than of the individual or social conditions which created it, is here denied. And implicit here, also, is the subordination of individual talent to general trends of maturation and decay. The genius of the playwright is questioned because he is powerless to alter anything more than inconsequential details : Shakespeare is more a competent expositor of a developed complex than a true creator—had he been born thirty

years later, when the whole impulse of renaissance drama was floundering, his plays would have been weak and voiceless, even if they were the best of their own time.

Moden theory finds this subordination of art and individual talent repugnant:

> 'Darwinian or Spenserian evolutionism is false when applied to literature because there are no fixed genres comparable to biological species which can serve as substrata of evolution. There is no inevitable growth and decay, no transformation of one genre into another, no actual struggle for life among genres ......A work of art is not simply a member of a series, a link in a chain.'[1]

Despite the above, who would deny that there have been literary fashions and movements which have exhibited the biological process in as close parallel as possible? and has not Aristotle shown that at least in tragedy there were something like 'fixed genres' which provided the substratum upon which successive tragic dramatists worked to develop its refined, natural form? a non-commonsense view of time should not become the foundation of a series of sophistries which go against observation verified both by history and intuition. Some kind of helical[2] rise-and-fall is visible in human activity, and art is no exception.

Following upon his detailed anticipation of critical objections and their correct solutions comes a comparison of Tragic and Epic poetry. The two have much in common, the method and diction being the same and the peculiar kind of pleasure they give being similar. They differ in that the epic is larger, less disciplined by plot, purpose and structure, and employs

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1. R. Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, 51. See Footnote to page 80.

2. This word is chosen in preference to 'cyclic', which would connote a fixed pattern of alternation. Day and night may alternate with each other, but no day or night is the same as any which preceded it, because the world has moved on, both in time and space. Classicism and romanticism are sometimes shown in alternation (the systole and diastole of art) but each new shift leads to a classicism or romanticism which is different from the preceding one.

narrative rather than dialogue and action. Although it is therefore a more flexible form it is inferior in terms of *effect*, so that we see in Aristotle once more how the end is always the measure of the means. Tragedy achieves more response in a shorter time, and it is helped further by the additions of music and spectacle. He claims that its reality is 'felt in the play as read, as well as in the play acted', a statement which seems dubious.

Faults in acting, histrionics and excessive movements, are not the faults of the tragic drama but of the interpreters ; and these faults could well be present in a recitation of an epic also. There is more schematic unity in the tragedy than in the epic, and more selectivity. By a simple process of totting up pluses and minuses, we come to the conclusion that the tragedy is better than the epic for the achievement of a particular end:

> 'If, then, Tragedy is superior in these respects, and also besides these, in its poetic effect (since the two forms of poetry should give us, not any or every pleasure, but a very special kind we have mentioned), it is clear that, as attaining the poetic effect better than the Epic, it will be the higher form of art.'

The mind baulks at this kind of comparison, tending to come out with replies like, 'O yes, but I know of two tennis-players, one of whose backhand, forehand, service and volley are all more crisply and correctly produced than the other's but who still loses to the other sometimes.' It might be asserted that the best tragedy is always more effective than the best epic for the attainment of a particular pleasure, but we are entitled to ask if the purpose of tragedy and epic are entirely the same ;[1] in the event of this being so, why has such a limited purpose

1. The richly embroidered tapestry, the broad spectrum of emotions, the leisurely, heightened narrative which has time to pause and digress, the scope and range of thought which far exceeds the capabilities of a tragedy designed to carry an audience along rather than make it think; one would not use a huge, multi-coloured boulder to press a nail into a block of wood when a sharp stroke with a hammer could do it better ; hence arises the feeling that the boulder is not meant for the same purpose as the hammer, although in its ponderous roll it may also press that nail in.

permitted the evolution of an inferior literary genre when a superior one exists? that both forms of poetry should give us not any or every pleasure, but a 'very special kind', and that the inferior one should continue to flourish in direct competition with the superior one, seems anomalous.

One the other hand, Aristotle's insight may have been infallible here. The epic as a serious literary endeavour seems to have lost ground[1] in the West since *Paradise Lost*, whereas tragedy has continued to press its claims.

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1. Its decline may also be attributed to the rise of the lyric, the brief, concentrated expression of emotion, at the centre of poetry. Innumberable minor epics have been written since Milton,a considerable one among them being Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustun*. But Keats' comments on his failure with *Hyperion* and Wordsworth's rejection of saga as a possible subject for his poem in Bk. I, of *The Prelude* indicate how unlikely both of these thought that an epic would secure much notice in their time.

PART III

Mimesis Aristotle gives us this statement (*Poetics*, IV)

> 'It is clear the general origin of poetry was due to two causes, each of them part of human nature. Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitating. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation.'

Art has its instinctive source in our delight in imitating, which is itself dependent on our curiosity and desire to learn. So far there can be no quarrel with Aristotle, except that the primary source of art becomes the same exactly as that of science or philosophy. He goes on:

> 'The truth of this second point is shown by experience : though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms for example of the lowest animals and of dead bodies. The explanation is to be found in a further fact : to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures not only to the philosopher but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it... Imitation, then, being natural to us—as also the sense of harmony and rhythm, the metres being obviously a species of rhythms—it was through their original aptitude, and by a series for the most part gradual on their first efforts, that they created poetry out of their improvisations.[1]

1. A statement which provides an answer to Wellek's objection on page 77. Artistic improvisation brings into being basic literary forms, which can than be improved upon gradually by the originators themselves and by succeeding artists.

We will take the first point in the foregoing, our instinctive delight in 'the most realistic representations'. Few will deny that realism in art stimulates pleasure in the beholder—the landscapes of Constable or the paintings of the Dutch and Italian masters would amply demonstrate this point, although some people might differ with his assertion that an exact imitation of ugly life forms or of dead bodies can also afford pleasure. Realism has been the guiding principle in art for a long time, despite what seem to be valid objections by Plato. For realism is really the ability to create a successful illusion. The painter who gives depth to his painting by suppressing some parts of his subject and heightening others, by placing some in shadow and some in light, by foreshortening and perspective, is presenting an illusion not a fact. A sculptor may spend hours rendering an exactly measured imitation of a figure in three-dimensions, but at best his imitation will be an imitation of the appearance of his subject, not of its *reality*. As such it is hardly a worthwhile exercise. Plato was in favour of stylised forms in art, in preference to precise imitations.

It is obvious that in art exact imitation is impossible. If the artist could represent his subject perfectly, to the point of creating skin over a skeleton of bone, complete with all the internal organs, and somehow breathe life into the whole, he would no longer have an image of the thing but another version of the thing itself; and when the original existed anyhow, it would seem unnecessary to copy him exactly. If the existence of one John Smith gives no particular pleasure, (although an imitation of John Smith might), the existence of another will not add anything[1]. One development has taken place since his time which forces us to disagree with Aristotle when he says :

> 'the reason of the delight in seeing pictures is that one is at the same time learning—gathering the meaning of things, e.g., that the man there is so-and-so ; for if one has not seen the thing before, one's pleasure will not be in the picture as an imitation of it, but will be due to the execution or colouring or some similar cause.'

1. Also, to create a permanent imitation of something impermanent, is to create an illusion. An 'immortal' imitation of a 'mortal' John Smith could never be an exact imitation.

Photography is the invention which has put paid to the first part of the statement. The degree of imitation attained in photography exceeds that of the most carefully painted picture, yet it is usually the painting which is accorded the title of art, not the photograph. The pleasure of recognition obtained from the painting, which is the inferior representation, exceeds that obtained from the photograph. One is led to the conclusion that the primary source of pleasure is the skill, imagination and technique used by the artist, the secondary is the subject. In fact the subject may be eliminated; one does not have to first see Salisbury Cathedral to enjoy Constable's version of it, nor to have known La Giaconda to marvel at Da Vinci's painting. And if it is argued that the landscape and building to be found in Constable's painting, and the woman who is the subject of Da Vinci's portrait, are all recognisable by virtue of their being general things, what about the pleasure which is derived from the contemplation of something which is of itself meaningless but which has been rendered artistically? The patterns in some Persian carpets represent nothing, but the effect is pleasant.[1] Our pleasure seems to be in knowing that a thing is an imitation and in our appreciation of the skill which has gone into the creation of that imitation ; a kind of art for craft's sake.

The concept of imitation has dominated literary theory since Aristotle, continuing even through the romantic movement and its shift in perspective to expression. Varying shades of the concept, whether the imitation should be realistic (as it was in antiquity and at various periods in history) or stylised, selective or total, subject to the artist's interpretations or completely impersonal, critical and purposeful or merely passive and indifferent, suggestive or explicit, symbolic or factual, covert or overt, of form or of matter, appearance or archetype —have provided the rationale of every school of thought in

1. Though not to Southey : 'A waste of ornament and labour characterises all the works of the Orientalists. I have seen illuminated Persian manuscripts that must each have been the toil of many years, every page painted, not with representations of life and manners, but usually like the curves and lines of a Turkey carpet, conveying no idea whatever, as absurd to the eye as nonsense verses to the ear.' *(Poetical Works)*.

art. Included in this statement is the whole complex of theory which led to the age of romanticism. In the eighteenth century we come across a host of minor theorists who believe that the basic instinct is to express, not to imitate, and that poetry has its beginnings in the rhythmical expressions of joy at the knowledge of life and creation, or grief at the loss of lover or friend, or anger, admiration and other strong primary instincts, either pure or variously modified and combined. Early man, created with all his faculties and senses, endowed with speech and reason, 'opened his eyes in a delightful plain and viewed for the first time the serenity of the sky, the verdure of the fields and woods, the glowing colours of the flowers', and could not refrain from bursting into an ecstasy of joy and of pouring his praises to God in a rhythmical, elevated manner. But however much these theorists would like to differentiate between expression and description (imitation through words) the fact remains that what is expressed is still, in all probability, an imitation of something inside the artist; for the concept need not be limited to objects in the external world —the artist is free to imitate other artists without referring to nature (in the Augustan age we get several 'imitations' of Horace or Plautus or the old Greeks), or to imitate something within himself, be it a sound, pattern or rhythm.

Although the principle in general seems to hold good, there are some areas which are open to doubt. Music without words, especially of the Western, heavily orchestrated kind, cannot be seen as an obvious imitation of anything, external or internal. Of course, there may have been, in the composer's inner ear, all the sounds, melodies, rhythms and harmonies which he has transplanted in the body of an external composition, and it is possible to state that he has therefore imitated what was already inside him. But it is strange that what is inside him can evoke an aesthetic response in others when it is externalised through various instruments, so one is forced to postulate a point of contact between peole, which works on the internal through the external. The rhythms, sounds and harmonies used by the composer must be general otherwise they will not be appreciated: yet truth to tell there is nothing in nature which corresponds even vaguely

to, say, Beethoven's *Fifth*: most of the neat arguments about unworded music being an 'imitation' of the sounds of nature—the chirruping of birds, the lowing of cattle, the wind through the trees and so on—are not convincing. Nor is there any good explanation for the psychological effect of rhythm ; there may be a general periodicity in nature, there may be a half-conscious awareness of the pulse which gives us life, but this does not explain the pleasure and euphoria which can result from rhythmical sounds or actions.

Dancing also seems to be no obvious imitation of anything. 'Rhythm alone, without harmony, is the means in the dancer's imitations ; for even he, by the rhythms of his attitudes, may represent men's characters, as well as what they do and suffer.' So says Aristotle, yet one must feel that dancing is a hopelessly weak means of representing characters and suffering, especially when miming and acting exist to do it better. Dancing as an art form is equiped to express very few states of mind—mostly happiness, be it due to love, victory in war, achievement or triumph over a rival. Japanese and Western choreography demonstrate this point well ; most of the action in a ballet is flat and unconvincing until it breaks with perfect propriety into movements representative of joy.

One supposes from all this that Aristotle uses the word quite loosely. Hamilton Fyfe says: 'Aristotle's use of the word carries no such suggestion (of realism). The poet produces the essentials of life and the emotions which they have aroused in him......It is in that sense that the poet (whether in verse or in prose) communicates his emotion by "imitating" or recreating life: (*Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, 2). Yet the suggestion of realism is there, in the quotation given before; (we delight to view the 'most realistic representations') and Wellek appears to put Aristotle in with the advocates of realism. Clearly the word has a more comprehensive meaning than either 'the essentials of life and the emotions they have aroused' or extreme fidelity to nature. It embraces realism, selectivism, impressionism. expressionism and non-representationalism (if such an 'ism' exists).

Just to make the matter difficult, however, we come across this statement: 'Epic poetry and Tragedy, as also Comedy, Dithyrambic poetry, and *most* flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation.' The trouble is caused by the word 'most'; Aristotle is not being categorical here. Does this mean that *some* kinds af flute-playing and lyre-playing can be non-imitational ? in which case we must take a closer look at the arguments of the late-eighteenth century with regard to the 'non-representational' nature of music. This much seems to be admissible: music without words can achieve great effect, while a pleasing pattern of liness and colours which do not represent anything can also evoke some aesthetic response. Whether 'imitation' can include these phenomena or not is another matter.

Lowest on the scale are the grunts and groans uttered by human beings under emotional stress. They are instinctive and expressive of the emotions which cause them. Sometimes they are rhythmical, like the moans of a man suffering extreme physical pain. Laughter is another expression of an emotional state of mind. Most of our rudimental responses could be conveyed by sounds and actions which do not require the use of words for their elaboration. In fact, all attempts at elaboration and explanation would undoubtedly weaken the pristine spontaneity of these sounds. An artist wishing to convey some emotion could do so by producing the appropriate grunts. Music could be seen as a development and refinement of these basic sounds, not necessarily more powerful, but certainly more pleasing by virtue of its being more subtle and orderly. Next on the list is probably poetry, weaker than both grunts and music in its spontaneity, but more flexible than either because it uses words which enable it to incorporate a whole new field of concept and description, while yet retaining something of its first source. Painting and sculpture are even more positive in that they attempt to stabilise the feeling[1] in visual reproductions, but they suffer somewhat by eliminating sounds and becoming static.

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1. The feeling implicit in a realistic painting is, 'I have found this tree so beautiful that I can best express my response to it by reproducing it exactly'. The love for the subject is in the hard work which the artist is willing to expend on it. Imitation is the best form of flattery.

Poetry comes out top because, while it can never as be moving as music, nor as visually sharp as painting, it can employ some of the effects of both plus move into a world of verbal meaning. In the whole complex of tragedy, music and spectacle (the acted version of painting) are shown as accessories, pleasing and considerable in their own way, but subordinate nonetheless.

The concept of imitation, whatever its precise determination in Aristotle might be, has usually been employed as a point of reference for strict emulation. Theories of realism or naturalism, which had wide currency in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, deal primarily with one side of the truth contained in the concept, which is that art must concern itself with nature, either external or internal. It is unlikely, however, that Aristotle meant that the definitive in art had been reached when a tree was painted exactly like a tree, or even when the artist had successfully, conveyed his emotional response to that tree. In either case this would be a mere reproduction of things within the phenomenal world. Plato's objection that the tree is itself an imitation of the archetype and therefore the artist's imitation of the tree is no more than an imitation of an imitation, is answered in Aristotle that the artist refers not only to the tree but also to its universal, hence it is a step closer to, not further from, reality. Realism here implies, not a reference to the phenomenal world or the inner world of feeling, but to the universal, itself related to, but greater than, those worlds.[1] This implication is taken up by Sidney in greater detail in his *Apologie;* the artist creates a golden world where nature presents a brazen. It retains verisimilitude only so that the audience may be comfortably familiar with what it presents, but this is a means not an end; the end is to bring meaning into chaos, order into confusion, purpose into indifference.

An attempt to relate Aristotle's 'universal' to Plato's 'Ideal' would run counter to Aristotle's tendency to reduce all causes to a known cause because it insinuates that the artist can be the recipient

1. The arguments by no means end here. The very process of art may give a permanance and timelessness to an otherwise transient phenomenon, and thus bequeath on it a kind of universalism. A particular tree may die, but its reproduction on canvas will live long. Aristotle shows no inclination to accept Plato's doctrine of Ideas (see the *Metaphysics, VI* and *IX).*

of some extra-sensory inspiration. His imagination is no more than the permutations and combinations of sense data which are dependent on phenomena ; it is unlikely that he will ever be able to rise into the ideal world ; the alternatives which he might propose, no matter how ingenious, will still be circumscribed by partial reality. In the *Metaphysics* he states (trans. W. D. Ross, I) :

> 'All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses ; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves......
>
> Now from memory experience is produced in men ; for the several memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience. And experience seems pretty much like science and art but really science and art come to men *through* experience ; for 'experience made art' as Polus says, 'but inexperience luck'. Now art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgement about a class of objects is produced. For to have a judgement that when Callias was ill of this disease this did him good; and similarly in the case of Socrates and in many individual cases, is a matter of experience ; but to judge that it has done good to all persons of a certain constitution, marked off in one class, when they were ill of this disease...this is a matter of art.'

or, art is akin to inductive science in that it makes judgments of a universal nature based on experience ; Art is a Criticism of Experience, almost. As he says further, 'experience is knowledge of individuals, art of universals', and,' If a man has the theory without the experience, and recognizes the universal but does not know the individual included in this, he will often fail to cure ; for it is the individual that is to be cured...men of experience know that the thing is so, but do not know why, while the others know the 'why' and the cause...and therefore we think art

more truly knowledge than experience is ; for artists can teach,[1] and men of mere experience cannot.'

It may be said that the universal in Aristotle is not a recognition of a metaphysical truth, but an inductively achieved wisdom founded on wide experience. Art continues to be a human rather than a divine activity ; inspiration and intuition are no more than the subconsious workings of human reason. The poetic judgment has no qualitative difference from the scientific one. The area of study might be different. The scientist busies himself with things, the poet with people—he is a composite anthropologist/sociologist/psychologist with the gift of good expression.

Aristophanes asks, in the *Frogs* :

> Pray, tell me on what particular ground a poet should claim excellence',

stating here an early desire by the critic for some standard in the measurement of art. It is difficult to think of the concept of mimesis as such a standard. 'Art is an imitation of life' is a statement of fact, not of desirability. Art, good or bad *does* imitate life, hence there is little point in stating that it ought to. Implicit in the three terms of the proposition is a triple ambiguity. To state that the best art should be the best imitation of life is to say little, subject to the foregoing arguments in this essay. The

1. Which would place didactic art above the kind of art which merely expresses or desribes experience. This is denied by Scott-James *The Making of Literature*, 42) 'I hope it is clear that when we speak thus of "art" we mean "fine art"...I do not include "didactic" literature.' 'Elsewhere, he says' Art does not attempt to teach. It merely asserts..." (Compare this with Sidney when he defends art by saying that it never asserts, hence never lies). Scott-James claims that art is less than reality in its imitation, but greater than phenomenal reality because it incorporates the Idea or Form and in doing so gives to 'some little bit of the world —which, in Plato's language, is changing, manifold, and disordered—a permanance, a unity, an orderintroduced into it by that faculty of the mind which we call Imagination.' Aristotle talks similarly, but the Idea of his artist is more in the order of a universal reason than of a recognition of Ideal Forms. By sifting and sorting through several parellel experiences the poet begins to see the common substratum and to understand the way in which it works. The mystical flash is eliminated.

most realistic imitation is not necessarily the best; the best illusion of tangibility in the painting, say, of a man's nose, will not mean that this is the best possible rendering of that nose. To assert that the best art is an imitation of the best nose connotes that the true subjects of art must be limited only to their best representatives. And then, to apply the superlative to all three terms *i. e.* the best art is the best imitation of the best life, is to invite trouble. The reason is straightforward. It is normally said that an adjective qualifies the noun, but it is clear that the noun must also qualify the adjective. 'Best man' 'and' best woman' would suggest different things when taken as phrases. 'Best man' has come to mean the friend of the bridegroom at a Christian wedding who helps in the ceremony, while 'best' woman would mean the most excellent woman. Or see the fallacy in the following argument: a good versifier writes good verse; a blank versifier writes blank verse. 'Blank' as applied to verse means something quite different from 'blank' as applied to versifier.

By analogy we are entitled to think that 'best' when applied to each term of the proposition will suffer some kind of change. 'Best' art could mean that which is most effective or moving, throwing the onus on the audience. 'Best' imitation seems to move inexorably towards high-fidelity in reproduction. 'Best' life means a selection from experience based on moral considerations. It may not be fallacious to say that the most moving forms of art are the most realistic imitations of the most moral aspects of life. But if there is no fallacy here, there appears to be an error. *Is* this kind of art most moving?

Then to judge a piece of literature by something external to it, *i.e.*, it is not excellent by virtue of itself but by virtue of its ability to move an audience, is to introduce a variable dependent on the mood, tastes, comfort, education and receptivity of that audience, something liable to fluctuate from day to day and year to year. No *standard* could be fixed on audience-response. Yet Aristotle apparently uses this as his yardstick at every step, not

so much as a measure of the play's excellence, but as a measure of its functionality. When we say that the personality of so-and so is good we are injecting a response to so-and-so which is external to him ; man's personality depends less perhaps on his characteristics like frankness, uprightness etc., than on his effect upon us, and it is easy to see that his effect on various people will be variable, for what seems frank to one person will seem cruel to another, what seems upright to one might seem prudish to another. Hence it will be impossible for us to assert that so-and-so has (for all people and at all times, as though it is something he possesses) a good personality. The same problem faces us when we talk about assessing a play. To use audience-response as a touchstone is uncertain, for what moves A to pity and fear might move B to derision.

To measure it in terms of its moralising power is to invite the same objections. A single stimulus may evoke a different response in A and B, the one might be swept along, the other might remain sceptical and contemptuous. Hence it would be difficult to assert that this play is good because it makes men even better, or that this play is better than that because it has made more men better than has that play. Aristophanes makes Euripides reply to the question:

> 'If his art is true, and his counsel sound ; and if he brings help to the nation,
>
> By making men better in some respect.'[1] ;

which is a tissue of question begging. What is true art? it is that art which is true. What is sound counsel? it is that counsel which is sound. How shall it make men better? by making them better, etc.

There can be no escape from subjective value judgment

1. Quoted in Scott-James, *The Making of Literature*, 36.

when it comes to criticism, so we may applaud Aristotle's insight in subjecting the whole thing to the mass psychology of the audience. The odd cynic or philistine would not matter, the one who laughs when he should cry would not matter, the one who yawns when he should tremble would not matter. In general the cathartic reaction would be good for both individual and state, and it is this general good which is to be made the criterion. 'the end is the good of the thing', says Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (II) ; effect is the measure of the cause, and if the play is to be seen as a cause, it is to be evaluated by its effect.

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